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HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY
FROM THE FIRST PROPAGATION OF
CHRISTIANITY IN BRITAIN

THE
HISTORY
OF
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.

VOL. I.

H. Mozley, Printer, Derby.

THE
HISTORY
OF

Religious Liberty

FROM THE
FIRST PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN BRITAIN,
TO
THE DEATH OF GEORGE III.,

INCLUDING
ITS SUCCESSIVE STATE, BENEFICIAL INFLUENCE, AND
POWERFUL INTERRUPTIONS.

By BENJAMIN BROOK.

In two Volumes.

VOL. I.

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P R E F A C E.

THE doctrine of Religious Liberty is always worthy of human investigation, and, to a generous mind, it is always gratifying and profitable. The more it is tried, as gold tried in the furnace, the more will its intrinsic worth and untarnished lustre appear. The prevailing ignorance of this doctrine is not occasioned by any mystery or obscurity in it, but by the prejudice and passions of men. In all ages, men have allowed their minds to be improperly influenced by strong attachments to a party, and powerfully attracted by outward appearance and secular interest : by which means they have rendered themselves incapable of investigating, or even of understanding, this important doctrine. In all our researches, let the mind be cool and unbiased, and, making truth our constant guide, we shall ultimately arrive at entire satisfaction. The avenues of our understandings not being obscured by prejudice and prepossessions, but constantly open to evidence and conviction, the result will afford a bountiful recompence for all our toil.

In the volumes now offered to the public, the author has made unadorned truth, as derived from the pages of divine inspiration, and the most approved historical records, his constant guide ; having endeavoured throughout to trace, with unbiased fidelity, the actual state and successive progress of liberal principles, with their meliorating influence on society and the church of God. To accomplish these great objects, he has brought to light multiplied intolerant

proceedings and disgraceful persecutions, which the best of men in all ages, have endured for the sake of truth and a good conscience. The developement of these powerful and long-continued interruptions to religious freedom, necessarily led him to an undisguised exposure of almost innumerable usurpations and oppressions, from catholics and protestants; showing, throughout, their open repugnance to Christianity, enlightened policy, sound philosophy, the rights of conscience, and every principle of humanity.

He is sufficiently aware, that the multiplied *facts* here detailed will not be cordially relished by persons whose education or secularity prompts them to intolerance; but, since they are facts which will perhaps never be questioned;—facts derived from the most faithful and approved historical records, and fraught with invaluable instruction, they are submitted to the candour and judgment of every enlightened mind.

For the satisfaction of the inquisitive reader, correct reference is made, on all points of importance, to the most respectable authorities, and, on points of minor consideration, the authorities are generally inserted. This, the author considered as indispensably necessary, in order to answer every objection that might arise, and remove every possible cause of jealousy from the mind of the reader. Numerous quotations will be found as nearly as possible in the very words of the authorities referred to, especially in those interesting and important occurrences which seemed to require this kind of exactness; and in no instance is there any further variation of the words, than appeared indispensably necessary for the use of modern readers.

The author has made it a leading object to furnish the reader with the only proper ground of concord and liberality among Christians. The errors, super-

stitutions, and persecutions of our ancestors, which some would have buried in forgetfulness, ought certainly to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth, as a seasonable warning to the present generation, and a useful lesson to posterity. This will make no alteration of their true character. Those who are displeased at the exposure of these evils, whether in others, or in their own party, rarely "know what manner of spirit they are of;" are usually under the dominion of the same temper; and, if placed in like circumstances, would commit similar outrages. It cannot, therefore, be too early for these abuses to be corrected!

Nothing has so much obstructed the progress of Christianity in the world, as the absurd and selfish doctrines, together with the superstitions and slavish practices, which have been blended with it, and fathered upon it. As the religion of Jesus Christ was, for many centuries, completely buried under so great a mass of rubbish, that it could scarcely be distinguished from the foulest Paganism; so to free Christianity from these heterogeneous and foreign mixtures, and to fix it on its only foundation, unclouded and unencumbered by human appendages, is the noblest effort of man, and the greatest benefit to society. The strongest reasons that can possibly exist, therefore, enforce a temperate, but manly statement of the actual situation and beneficial influence of Religious Liberty, together with its multiplied interruptions, from the earliest period to the present time.

Persons whose minds are thoroughly liberalized will not censure others for worshipping God according to their conceptions of the Gospel. They cannot help feeling the highest respect for those who zealously propagate what are called the essentials of Christianity; yet they always feel the greatest pleasure in holding out the right hand of fellowship to

all pious Christians, by whatever name they may be called. They cannot attach to any man the least degree of criminality, for exercising the right of private judgment—a right which the Creator has equally conferred upon every intelligent creature. There may be a manly statement of principles, without the smallest portion of bigotry. The lovely grace of charity may be in full operation, as combined with unshaken firmness. Freedom of sentiment may be fully allowed to others, and still be unreservedly employed by ourselves. By avoiding the odious stigma of bigotry and intolerance, we do not betray the cause of truth by apathy and supineness.

Had the Christians of former ages firmly adhered to the authority of the Gospel, as sacred and inviolable, discarding the fatal principle of expediency; had they consulted the will of Christ as contained in his holy word, instead of idolizing the taste, the caprice, the fashion of the day, the man of sin would never have trampled upon the prostrate liberties of Christendom; nor would the darkness of the middle ages have wrapt in its deadly shades, from generation to generation, the churches of the living God.

All professing Christians ought to feel jealous of every thing that bears the semblance of an innovation upon the simplicity of the New Testament; and unless the ample and melancholy page of history is opened to them in vain, they will feel themselves scrupulously bound to reject the irreligious follies of their forefathers, lest the world should again be visited with the darkness and intolerance of the papal usurpation. The very possibility of the recurrence of these evils, or any portion of them, stamps the greatest importance on every deviation from the plain path of truth; and Christians of every name, on whose hearts the lessons of history have been in-

scribed, who are capable of rising above the prejudices and passions of the multitude, and who can reason from past events, will “Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free, and not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

In modern Europe, where every thing that takes place is accurately known to the magistrate, unless religious liberty be enjoyed, pure Christianity will be unable to find an entrance. Or if it have by any means gained admittance, it holds a very precarious existence ; and if in this case an attempt be made to propagate the religion of Christ, without the allowance of which religious liberty is an empty name, a single frown from the political head is the certain signal of its departure. The history of Europe, especially of our own country, from the days of Constantine to the close of the seventeenth century, furnishes a luminous commentary on this subject, and a useful lesson to mankind.

Enlarged conceptions of the rights of conscience, and a resolute adherence to the principles of religious freedom, if considered apart from man’s immortal destinies, and unconnected with his eternal interests, become inferior objects of literary research and political discussion : but when viewed in their close relation to the spiritual welfare of man, and in their tendency to promote the salvation of souls, they become a nobler theme—they acquire unspeakable worth.

When the doctrine of religious liberty shall be universally understood and scrupulously observed by all denominations of Christians, it will annihilate that system of antichristian proselytism which has hitherto been so tenaciously upheld by the bigoted or interested partizans of every sect ; will effectually destroy party-prejudice, and every root of bitterness among Christians ; will promote, on its only proper

foundation, “ the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” When the rights of conscience, and the principles of religious freedom, are consecrated to the service of the sanctuary of God, they become objects of the greatest regard to the ministers of Jesus Christ, and of unspeakable utility to mankind. On account of their tendency to promote pure religion in the world, and their utility in augmenting its influence on society, they have been strongly recommended to posterity. These important considerations, together with the desire of rescuing from oblivion or misrepresentation, the most glorious transactions of our country ; the opportunity afforded of giving some instruction on the true character and influence of Christianity ; and the hope of impressing on the minds of Christians, those invaluable lessons which are applicable to all ranks of men, in all countries, at all times—have induced the author to offer his work to the attention and candour of the public.

The continuance of Christianity in any country, depends very much on the permanency of religious liberty. If this important doctrine be disallowed, voluntary piety is the dream of enthusiasts ; the oracles of God are convertible to the sense of those in power ; and the whole train of ecclesiastical officers, from the highest to the lowest, is one long muster-roll of the tools of statesmen—a disgrace to their species—a contradiction to their possession—a dishonour to God !

What then is Religious Liberty ? It is that liberty or right which every man possesses to believe the Gospel, to worship God, to profess and propagate religion, without human molestation. It is that unalienable right which is essential to our rational nature, and which is given us by our Creator, to examine and embrace, to practise and promote religion

to the widest possible extent, without the compulsive or restrictive interference of man. Religious Liberty, says a learned churchman, is one of the *rights of human nature, antecedent to society, which no man can relinquish ; since it is essential to his constitution, and out of his power, to surrender to another.* The religion of Christ, he adds, makes its way by argument and persuasion, and is matter of individual choice, not of force or violence.* To pretend, therefore, to examine or embrace, to practise or promote religion, before we have proved our *right* so to do, is equally fallacious as to pretend to cultivate an estate, before we have made good our title to it.

From the foregoing statement, it will appear, that the great doctrine agitated by the patrons of religious freedom, and the advocates of ecclesiastical power, is not which denomination of Christians ought to have the pre-eminence, and the power of controlling the religion of other members of society : but, to the exclusion of all theological disputation, it is a doctrine reduced to a *plain historical fact*—a fact which no man will dispute, who has carefully and impartially examined the page of history. To favour the reader with a lucid and successive view of this important fact, is one principal design of the author in the publication of these volumes.

It ought not to be forgotten, that, whilst the guarantee of religious freedom has always been exceedingly partial, those who have suffered under this partiality, and have endeavoured to vindicate their rights, have for the most part proceeded upon narrow and erroneous grounds, suited only to promote the interest of their own sects. Christian freedom, securing to every man the rights of human nature,

* Warner, vol. i. p. 24, 44.

knows no distinction of sects and parties ; but allows and guarantees to all mankind, the unmolested use of their understandings and consciences, in all things pertaining to the worship of God and their eternal salvation. This gives dignity and importance to the subject, and recommends it to the cordial approbation of all rational creatures.

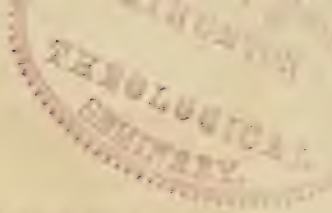
It is the wisdom of every government, as such, to let religion take its own course, and leave it to rest on the ground of its own excellence ; not to suffer any class of men to transgress the boundaries of their profession ; nor hold out any civil distinctions as a ground of jealousy and contention. A political priesthood, under any form of religion, is inimical to the happiness, the rights, the best interests of man. Unbounded religious liberty will no more break in upon the rights and happiness of others, than it would willingly suffer its own to be destroyed : no more injure good government, than it would be injured, oppressed, and ruined by tyranny. It is not a liberty to trample on religion, and sport with revelation ; but a liberty to examine religious opinions, to believe and profess them on conviction, and to direct our own religious practice according to the evidence of divine truth and the convictions of our minds, to the exclusion of all human interruption.

Religious liberty is of so much importance to mankind, that it is impossible for any nation to set too high a value upon it, or to be too jealous of every attempt that has a tendency to depreciate its benefits. It is one of the noblest gifts of God to mankind, the source of happiness to human life, and essentially necessary to all rational and acceptable religion. Life, without this liberty, is, to a generous mind, a burden and a torment. What can be greater degradation to a rational being, endowed by his Creator with powers

to think, judge, and decide for himself, than to become the property and slave of another, wearing the chains and fetters of the most infamous bondage?

Happy is that nation whose children are educated in the principles, and trained in the practice, of religious freedom ; are made acquainted, in their youthful days, with its nature and worth ; are inspired, from the earliest period, with ardent love to it : they will, by these means, discover their perfect abhorrence of those slavish principles and deceptive arts, by which designing men, in past ages, have invaded the rights, and impiously destroyed the noblest privileges of their country. This will prove the best and most effectual method of permanently securing the invaluable treasure, and of transmitting it down, from age to age, to the latest posterity. This treasure was bought with blood. We are a kingdom not of slaves, but of men. Our estates, our persons, our families, our consciences, our souls, our religion, our God, are all our own.

TUTBURY,
September 1, 1820.



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HISTORY

OF

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.

CHAPTER I.

FROM THE FIRST PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY, TO THE
DEATH OF KING HENRY VII.

SECTION I.

The Liberal Constitution of the Apostolic Churches.

THE glory of Messiah's kingdom formed an important article in the writings of the Hebrew prophets. "Those holy men, who, from time to time, were raised up to exercise their ministry in the Jewish church, foretold the advent of this illustrious personage, and described, in most glowing language, the majesty of his character, the extent of his empire, the blessings of his government, and the happiness which his subjects should enjoy under his mild and gentle reign." The chosen tribes, accordingly, anticipated his appearance with eager and high expectation, especially about the time of his coming in the flesh; and they anxiously looked for him as the great prince and deliverer of their nation, who should erect a kind of universal monarchy in the earth.

The Jews ardently longed for the accomplishment of the promises given unto their fathers; but their principal object

seems to have been the establishment of a temporal kingdom, like the kingdoms of the world, though far surpassing them in its extent and magnificence. Their fond expectations and wishes were, however, exceedingly erroneous ; which Messiah the Prince, on various occasions, openly corrected. Even his own disciples were unable to reconcile to their anticipations of a mighty deliverer, the sufferings and death of their King. According to his Regal character and office, "all power was given unto him in heaven and in earth ;" and he was, and still is, "The Head over all things to the church ;" but the empire which he came to establish, was totally distinct from every political institution, and consists of "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

The Jewish economy was a Theocracy, and introductory to Messiah's kingdom. The one was a type and shadow, the other was the substance, and intended to endure to the end of the world. When the latter was introduced and established by the authority of Christ ; the former received its completion, and then vanished away. The Jewish dispensation, with its numerous ceremonial observances and other peculiarities, has now no existence. National distinctions and ritual consecrations have ceased. The partition wall between Jews and Gentiles is demolished. Nothing local formed any part of the new economy. The true worshippers, who had heretofore worshipped the Father by the obscure medium of typical observances, were henceforth required to worship him in the simplicity of spiritual obedience, no longer attaching sanctity to places, nor efficacy to national privileges. "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in *spirit* and in *truth* ; for the Father seeketh such to worship him." This is the cardinal law and basis of the new economy, in which Messiah is the only Lord and Judge. His dominion has an immediate relation to the understandings, consciences, and souls of his people ; and is intended to prepare them for that sublime state, where knowledge and rectitude, love and obedience, harmony and felicity, will shine in their fullest glory for ever.

No fact can be more conspicuous than the constant solicitude manifested by our Saviour, to exclude the operation of

secularity in the reception of his doctrine. When he was arraigned at Pilate's bar, and questioned about his claim to regal dignity, he unequivocally said, "MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD." He boldly owned himself to be a king; yet, whilst advancing his title and claim to the honours of royalty, he explicitly informed Pilate, not only that the authority of Cæsar had nothing to dread from him, but that his disciples could expect no secular advantages as the result of embarking in his cause. And when his disciples "disputed among themselves who should be the greatest," he expressly told them, that lordship and authority formed no part of what they had to expect as his followers, who himself "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." They were extremely slow to believe, that he came not to establish a temporal, but a spiritual kingdom. His death plunged them into despondency, but did not wholly dissipate their delusions: "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel."

After the Saviour's resurrection from the dead, the hopes of the disciples seemed to be rekindled, and with great solicitude they inquired: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" A remarkable change, however, subsequently took place in their views and dispositions; when the circumstances of the Christian calling seemed to preclude the possibility of secularity vitiating the motives of professed converts. When it was fully ascertained, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," no room was left for the operation of any lower inducements to espouse the cause of Christ, than those which had an immediate respect to the recompense of a future reward. No one could profess the Gospel with any rational prospect of improving his temporal condition, but only with the view of obtaining the kingdom of heaven. In perfect conformity to this statement, the founders of the new economy used their utmost efforts to preserve the minds of their respective converts from mixing secularity and a worldly spirit with their religious profession. They inculcated the following useful lessons upon this point:—"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."—"Set your affection on

things above, not on things on the earth.”—“ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth ; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”—“ Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

The ministry of the Gospel was not instituted to promote the secular interest of any one ; but was an office of a purely spiritual nature, having an exclusive reference to objects of infinitely greater moment than those of philosophers, politicians, and the men of this world. Its perfection as a means consists in its simplicity, while its efficiency depends on the promised agency of the Spirit of God ; and it has one simple end in view, to which it is perfectly and exclusively adapted ; that end is the salvation of souls.

The primitive Christians were absolutely uninfluenced by secular allurements. This is the unvaried opinion of all our historians. “ They neither had, nor strove to obtain, the least secular support of any kind. They lay exposed to the rage of the whole world around them, incited by its natural enmity against God and love of sin. They had not the least legal or secular aid against persecution. Obligated, like all other subjects of the Roman empire, to contribute to the general defence, and to serve the Roman armies, when called on, they had no civil privileges : if the emperor chose to persecute, they were perfectly defenceless, and had no political resource against persecution.”*

What are the motives then which the inspired writers propose to call into action as substitutes for secular allurements ? “ The love of Christ constraineth us.”—“ They watch for your souls as those that must give account.”—“ Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Any motives short of these, could not, in their view, produce a suitable care of souls ; nor could any qualifications exclusive of these, constitute a fitness for the ministerial office.

The idea of bribing men to teach, and that of coercing them to believe, were equally remote from the views which the apostles entertained of the religion of Jesus Christ. They

* Milner's Church Hist. vol. i. p. 553, 554.

disclaimed alike all dominion over the faith of Christians, and all the craft of worldly policy, contenting themselves with inculcating on the churches the equitable principle, that "the labourer is worthy of his hire." No specific sum was exacted, no kind of compulsive authority employed; they simply appealed to the gratitude and generosity of believers: "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?"—"Let him that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things."—The primitive mode of supporting the ministers of Christ, left Christianity to its pure and unbiassed operation; no other method could have been congenial to its true character, or to its munificent intentions.

As the primitive churches were spiritual institutions, and Christ himself was the only Head; so their prosperity could be promoted only by those means which Christ himself appointed. Only so far as the minds of the people were enlightened by divine truth, their consciences impressed with the authority of God, and their hearts engaged in heavenly pursuits, was the cause of undefiled religion promoted. How could coercive measures, any more than secular advantages, be applied to enlighten men's understandings, to awaken their consciences, to sanctify their hearts, to save their souls? Could persecution produce the fruits of holiness? or malevolence be employed to promote a kingdom of love and peace? The weapons of this warfare were not carnal or compulsive; but only mild and affectionate persuasion, directing the arrow of divine truth to the consciences of the people. A few plain and unlettered men were the instruments employed by our Lord for the advancement of his cause; and the only arms they used, were evangelical truth, laborious preaching, ardent prayer, unwearied patience, and a holy example. The instruments and the arms were perfectly suited to the nature of his cause, which consisted not of outward pomp, temporal power, or worldly policy, but of truth and righteousness, love and peace. The converts to Christ breathed that generous and benevolent spirit which is so profusely inculcated in the Gospel.

The first publishers of Christianity were destitute of temporal power and influence; their doctrine was obnoxious to a

depraved world ; their outward circumstances were contemptible ; and they could not present unto men any other inducement to embrace the Gospel, than the sure prospect of life and immortality in the world to come, with the certainty, that Christians “ must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” The success of their doctrine was directly opposed by the intolerance of princes, the wisdom of philosophers, the intrigues of courtiers, the enmity of the pagan priesthood, with all the weight of an established system of superstition and idolatry ; it could, therefore, only make its way by the force of its truth, the mildness of its character, and the power of the Holy Ghôst : thus conquering the malice and opposition of its enemies. External coercion had no place in the Christian code—constituted no part of the new economy : all such measures were considered as absolutely inapplicable and unavailable to promote the worship of “ God in spirit and in truth,” or to produce grace, and holiness, and happiness in the souls of the people.

The ministry of the Gospel rested on one secure foundation—the authority of Jesus Christ ; with one grand object in view—the salvation of souls. The superiority among the members of the apostolic churches, principally consisted of a larger portion of piety, labour, and usefulness ; and to all of them, without distinction, were addressed those directions and exhortations which pre-suppose a right and a competency to judge and to choose, to “ prove all things,” and to “ hold fast that which was good.” A restricted right of interpreting, believing, and improving these instructions, would have annulled their force and destroyed their meaning. Such a restriction could not exist among Christians when the means of interpretation were common to all, and the religious rights of all were perfectly equal.

No truth can be more evident than that the most liberal principles were uniformly inculcated by the founders of the Gospel, and appreciated by their individual converts. The Lord Jesus exhorted the people to “ search the Scriptures.” But what strange impertinence must this have been, if they did not possess an indubitable right of determining their true meaning, and of regulating their faith and practice accordingly ! Did he not also warn his disciples against either

surrendering or usurping this right? In concerns of this nature, said he, "call no man your father upon the earth; neither be ye called masters:" and did he not mean by this, that they should not impose their opinions upon others, nor suffer others to impose their opinions upon them? We read of the Saviour's using compulsive measures only in one solitary instance, and that was not to force profane people into the temple, but to drive them out of it. He never compelled the people, by external force, to receive his doctrine, or espouse his cause. When the disciples saw one casting out devils in the name of Christ, and they forbade him, "because," said they, "he followeth not with us," our Lord openly admonished and censured their erroneous conduct. And when his disciples would have commanded fire to descend from heaven to consume those who rejected his message, he rebuked them, saying: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." To execute judgment upon those who rejected Christ and his words, by punishing them in their bodies or estates, formed no part of his holy instructions or gracious intentions: "If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Our Lord, in the parable, prohibited his disciples from plucking up the tares, lest they should pluck up the wheat also; but said, "let them both grow together until the harvest:—the harvest is the end of the world."

Had the Saviour considered the right of private judgment as unlawful, or liberty of conscience as under human restrictions, he would no doubt have given instructions upon this point to Herod, Caiaphas, or some other persons of similar rank, and have invested them with power to convert the people and extend his cause—not by affectionate persuasion—not by a faithful exhibition of the Gospel;—but by the weight of their authority, and the plenitude of their official power. Instead of this, he exposed and condemned the doctrines and proceedings of the ecclesiastical governors, addressed his instructions indiscriminately to the people, and

affirmed as proof of his mission, that "the poor had the Gospel preached unto them."

The apostles, worthy followers of such a Master, in obedience to his command, went into all nations, preaching that doctrine which the rulers of the earth disbelieved, and inculcating that religious worship which they all opposed. They never refused to any man the unrestricted exercise of private judgment, or the entire liberty of worshipping God according to the convictions of his mind. They employed no oppressive restrictions, no temporal penalties to promote so sacred a cause; but, in perfect conformity to their heavenly commission, they went in every direction, "*teaching* all nations." They considered religion as a personal concern, excluding all coercive interference of man. They never entertained the wild notion, that human authority should be employed to enforce the Divine authority of the Gospel, or the claims of God. The whole of their authority was derived from their Divine commission, and by this commission it was limited. When the Jewish rulers assumed the authority of controlling religion, and the apostles refused to observe their commands, did they not, in the reason they assigned to justify their refusal, make an open protest against all penal and compulsive measures in the cause of religion, saying, "We ought to obey God rather than men?" And what can be the import of the following apostolical instructions, but the exclusion of all such measures under the New Testament economy?—"The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."—"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God."—"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth."

The apostles of our Lord were decidedly of opinion, that those who have to give an account of themselves hereafter, are bound to think and judge, believe and practise, for themselves now. "So then *every one* of us shall give account of *himself* to God. Let us not, therefore, judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way." On these

equitable and substantial grounds, the apostles made a direct appeal to the people, and called upon them to judge for themselves. Did not St. Paul thus address the Corinthians, “I speak as unto wise men, *judge ye* what I say?” Did he not thus address the Romans, “Let *every* man be fully persuaded in his *own* mind?” No one could misunderstand this. Did not the apostles openly disapprove and censure the conduct of Diotrophes, who sought and loved to have the pre-eminence over his brethren? Were not the Bereans applauded for searching the Scriptures daily, whether what the apostles preached was the true doctrine? Did not Gallio, the deputy-governor of Achaia, act worthily by refusing to judge in such matters? Were not the apostolical epistles addressed to all the members of those Christian societies to which they were sent, to be publicly read in their assemblies, and to be circulated, without restriction, for the use and benefit of every individual? The whole canon of the New Testament was sent abroad in the same spirit of general utility. Every man had perfect liberty to obtain copies of the Sacred Books, and felt himself perfectly unrestrained in the use and application of their contents. “Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Jerusalem, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,” both read and heard without control, “the wonderful works of God,” for their own edification and benefit. The Scriptures, therefore, do not condemn, but in the strongest terms *enjoin*, the exercise of private judgment, and unrestricted liberty of conscience. The Gospel breathes the most consummate benevolence; and its original promulgation was absolutely devoid of bigotry, secularity, and intolerance—it displayed the spirit of unbounded and untarnished liberality.

Nor did the first publishers of the Gospel overlook those false teachers who endeavoured to obtain great power and honour in the churches, and to bring their members under subjection to themselves. Men arose in those early times who attempted to introduce human traditions, as well as Jewish ceremonies, into Christian worship; and others, neglecting Christ and his apostles, sought to blend the speculations of pagan philosophy, and the doctrines and commandments of men, with the pure Gospel. All these dangerous

errors and innovations were alike indignantly rejected by the founders of the apostolic churches; which, being composed of far better materials, were erected upon a foundation much more honourable and secure. They were founded on the sole authority of Jesus Christ.

In conformity to the above important facts, are the sentiments of no less an authority than that of bishop Stillingfleet, who says, that “Christ who came to take away the unsupportable yoke of Jewish ceremonies, certainly did never intend to gall the necks of his disciples with another instead of it. The grand commission the apostles were sent out with, was only to *teach* what Christ commanded them. There is not the least intimation of any power given them to *impose* or *require* any thing beyond what himself had spoken to them, or they were directed to by the immediate guidance of the Spirit of God.”*

The preaching of the Gospel was the instituted means of diffusing undefiled religion, and the formation of Christian churches followed as the happy consequence. The apostles laboured in all places whither they went to promote the conversion of souls, after which, upon a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ, the converts were collected together, and formed into religious societies, called churches. There is no other way of gathering together its members out of the world, than by the preaching of the word. They were perfectly voluntary associations of the individuals who composed them, yet their union was the result of conviction and duty to Jesus Christ. Religious character was indispensably necessary to membership, and the sole qualification requisite to Christian communion. “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”—“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”—“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.”—“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

These primitive societies, agreeably to their holy character and design, considered the essence of Christianity as consisting not in refined speculation, external grandeur, or any forms

* Stillingfleet's Irenicum, Pref.

of worship whatever, but in the exemplification of faith in Jesus Christ, by a suitable Christian deportment. By the blessing of God upon the faithful ministry of the apostles, numerous Christian societies were formed in the places where they laboured; and, being dignified with the beauty of holiness, they, as lights set upon a hill, reflected a bright lustre in all directions, attracting multitudes, both Jews and Gentiles, to the cross of Christ. The apostles "went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." The heavenly rays of the Gospel suddenly shone through the world. The doctrine of the apostles and evangelists went into all the earth, and "their words to the end of the world:" so that, according to the ecclesiastical records of these early times, "throughout all cities and villages many very populous churches were established;" and they who had been the slaves of superstition and idolatry, were released from their "loathsome fetters," and brought to worship the true God.*

The churches of Christ, when organized, were furnished with bishops or pastors, chosen by the voice of the people, and supported by their spontaneous contributions. We are not instructed in the Christian code to promote Christianity by compulsive means, or penal edicts: but we hear a voice from heaven, saying, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." All the instructions and exhortations in the New Testament, as well as that liberality and forbearance which it so conspicuously displays, would have been without meaning on the principle of coercion. The doctrine of compulsion, as a means of promoting undeveloped religion, was not the doctrine of the primitive churches, and it betrays the grossest ignorance of Scripture, as well as of human nature. Men cannot be fined, or taxed, or forced into religion. The principle is evil; it is anti-christian; it is at the greatest possible distance from the liberal spirit and constitution of the apostolic churches.

The authority and appointment of Christ formed the constitution of his holy empire, and the traditions of men had no share in its spiritual government. These gracious regulations

* Euseb. Eccl. Hist. b. ii. c. 3.

proceeding from Him, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” are consummately wise;—being enacted by Him who is inflexibly just and supremely kind, they are perfectly good;—and being given by Him who searches the heart and is Lord of conscience, their obligations extend to the latent desires and intentions of the mind. The motives enforcing obedience are perfectly conformable to the spiritual nature and holy character of those Christian institutions; not consisting of penal sanctions or temporal privations, but of the smiles or frowns of Him who is judge of all, and at whose tribunal their eternal states will be unalterably fixed.

The infallible Legislator of these holy institutions provided, for the edification and encouragement of their members, those ordinances of Christian worship which should be at all times either necessary or useful to his people, and gave them all the requisite instructions how they were to be observed to the end of the world. The Lord Jesus, as the unerring governor of his churches, and as a distinguished part of his royal prerogative, prescribed and enforced the *whole* of that spiritual service, which, to the end of time, is to be presented unto God. He did not leave any part of it in an unfinished state, or liable to any additions, alterations, or improvements of man. When men appoint those things in religion, therefore, which Christ has not appointed, or set aside those things which he has enjoined, they commit dangerous encroachments on his regal authority, and, consequently, expose themselves to his awful displeasure. The former usurps his throne:—the latter annuls his laws.

Where then, it may be asked, shall we seek for information and guidance upon all points relating to the constitution of the primitive churches, the authority and number of their officers, together with the government of their members, but to the New Testament? From whom shall we derive correct ideas of the nature and design of Christian churches, if not from the direction and example of those, who, being the first followers, familiar friends, and inspired servants of Jesus Christ, best understood the laws, the spirit, and the intentions of his kingdom? Who is authorized to introduce any change in the essential laws and constitution of the churches of

Christ? to institute other terms of communion, or to dispense with those which Christ has instituted, by compulsory statutes, which supersede and preclude all selection of character? And why should it be deemed unlawful for Christians to associate together on the very same principles as those on which the primitive churches were founded, to employ the very same means, the preaching of the word, in order to their formation as the apostles themselves employed, and to attempt to realize the very same important spiritual objects which they so happily realized? These inquiries deserve the most attentive and dispassionate consideration.

The laws, government, and kingdom of Jesus Christ differ materially from those of the world. The qualifications and obedience of his subjects, were widely different from those of earthly princes. The profession of faith in Christ, attested by a corresponding Christian character, was an essential qualification to communion in the primitive churches, and to enjoy the confidence and affection of the brethren. The members of those churches were “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people,” intended to “show forth the praises of Him who had called them out of darkness into his marvellous light.” In obedience to the authority of their Lord and King, they “worshipped God in the spirit, rejoiced in Christ Jesus, and had no confidence in the flesh.” These were some of their most prominent qualifications; but, as it must obviously appear to every one, these could not constitute those qualifications which belonged to the faithful subjects of earthly princes. Men may be good subjects of a temporal prince, and be entitled to all the rights and privileges which belong to such, yet be so far from bearing any true allegiance to Jesus Christ, as to remain totally inimical to his government, and entire strangers to the benefits of his kingdom. The primitive Christians were partakers of the Saviour’s holy image, and transformed into his likeness. The doctrines which they believed, and from which they derived all their security and happiness, formed their common bond of union. They loved one another for the truth’s sake, which dwelt in them; and this love was not an inactive, dormant principle, but displayed by the most substantial acts of kindness and liberality. The words of our Lord, describing his obedient

subjects, are remarkable: "I have given them thy word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

The liberty claimed and enjoyed by the apostolic churches, could not be conceded to any power on earth. It was the gift of God, and essential to the existence of the kingdom of Christ. The great Creator had made it the duty of every individual to embrace the Gospel, as matter of conviction and unbiassed choice; therefore no one could, without flagrant injustice and cruelty, interfere with it; and since the discharge of this duty was inseparable from man's accountableness to God, the prerogative of allowing the people to observe it, as a plenary indulgence, or as a boon, could not belong to the church, nor to the magistrate. The apostolic churches never imposed grievous burdens upon the consciences of their converts, whom they neither created, nor redeemed, nor were appointed to judge. If these Christian converts did not enjoy entire freedom of belief, and of worship, who were invested with power from heaven to restrain them, and what means were to be employed in this labour of love? Let these questions be calmly and fearlessly answered.

The power of governing the churches of Christ, and of exercising the various functions belonging to them, like the laws themselves, was neither the gift of the people, nor any commission from princes. This prerogative had a much higher origin, and was derived from heaven. The Son of God, who redeemed the church with his own blood, was pleased to prescribe and permanently establish the whole of its holy administration. The commission which he gave his apostles is plain and decisive: "As the Father hath sent me, even so I send you."—"And, lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." He was not a temporal prince; he disclaimed all pretensions to that office. As the authority with which he invested his churches was not derived from earthly monarchs; so it could have no dependance upon them—it could not be forfeited to them—it could not without injustice be claimed by them. That which they had no power to give, they had no right to take away.

The primitive Christian churches, then, according to the representation, now attempted to be substantiated, were vo-

luntary societies, altogether spiritual in their nature, independent of any secular power, and subsisting by the direction and authority of Jesus Christ. To punish men for their religious delinquency by inflicting upon them temporal penalties, or otherwise than by excluding them from spiritual privileges, could not possibly belong to the churches of Christ. All such punishment would have been an express violation of the spirit and discipline of the Gospel, and directly subversive of the constitution and character of the churches, as religious societies instituted for religious purposes. The Christian churches could inflict only spiritual censure, which consisted of admonition and exclusion; they had no weapons but those which were spiritual, much less any weapons of vengeance.*

The history of the apostles, and of the first Christian churches, affords sufficient proof, that all ecclesiastical authority was derived from above, and that no part of it was under the control of man. When the Jewish sanhedrim, who acted under the authority of the Romans, and with the assistance of the captain of the temple, had imprisoned the apostles, and "commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus;" their answer was plain and decisive: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." They had a commission from heaven to preach the Gospel, which they were under the strongest obligation to execute, and which no temporal jurisdiction or authority on earth could revoke. Whereas, had the churches been under the control of the state, in such things, the apostles would have been guilty of disobedience to their superiors: they ought to have acquiesced in the prohibition, and not to have persevered in the exercise of their function, especially as they were so solemnly silenced by those whom they owned to be the "rulers of the people." The churches must, therefore, have been constituted independent of the state, or the apostles were guilty of sedition or rebellion. The same imputation will affect all the churches of Christ for the first three hundred years, who held their

* In these Introductory observations the Author acknowledges, that he has derived several valuable thoughts from Conder, "On Protestant Non-conformity."

public assemblies and regulated their ecclesiastical government, not only without the authority of their respective princes, but often directly contrary to their express command; which is a fact so indubitably attested on the page of history, that it would be altogether superfluous to allege any formal proof.*

If, indeed, the churches of Christ were absolutely independent of the state, and rested wholly, for their existence and all their regulations, on the authority of Christ, under *Pagan* princes, they could not, surely, be less so under those princes who afterwards professedly embraced Christianity. A prince's embracing Christianity could by no means enlarge his jurisdiction, or extend his government to religion; much less could it diminish and even *subvert* the independence of the churches. For what is that which constitutes the distinction between a *Pagan*, and a *Christian* prince? Nothing but baptism and the profession of Christianity: but this sacrament and that profession could never convey the least spiritual jurisdiction. On the contrary, so important a change could only import obedience and subjection to the laws of the religious Society into which the prince voluntarily entered; and consequently it could only make him a *member*—not a *governor* of the church of Christ.

The church and the state in the circumstances now adverted to, could not occasion the least painful apprehension to either. The church would remain in the same situation as it was left in by its divine Author, only with this additional circumstance, that the prince who was originally its enemy would be its friend. Nor would this settlement be at all prejudicial to the civil government. The independency of the churches could never shake the thrones of princes, or do the least disservice to their authority. The divine commission for the government of the churches of Christ, extends only to matters purely *spiritual*: their ministers and other members are still subjects of the commonwealth, and under the civil government of their princes. The churches, by their divine charter, can make no seizure of the rights or immunities of the state: their legislations and censures relate only to

* Collier's Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 258.

the invisible world. Jesus Christ has given them no authority to encroach upon the rights or prerogatives of princes. It is, however, equally true, that they are bound, under the strongest possible obligations, not to surrender their spiritual authority to the secular magistrate; and to attempt it would be an open violation of their divine establishment. Although the primitive churches propagated their faith, and governed their converts when oppressively persecuted by the state; yet they were always inoffensive and loyal subjects of the empire, rendering all that obedience to princes which was due to them.

The apostles, addressing their epistles to the respective churches, laboured to show, that Christianity was not designed to interfere in any respect with the political relations of society, much less to discharge them from their former political obligations. That ecclesiastical rule which they enforced upon them, widely differed from all kinds of political jurisdiction in this essential point, that it had no bearing upon the civil interests of mankind: it did not in the least affect either their persons or their property. They were anxious to impress upon the members of those Christian societies, that their having embraced the religion of Jesus Christ, did not release them from any civil obligations, and that in consequence of their religious profession, they were not subject to any alteration in their civil rights and immunities. As members of civil society, they were in no respect withdrawn from either the protection or the control of their civil governors; and they were brought under no new obligations, excepting those which were purely religious. Our Lord's celebrated injunction was an infallible guide in their intercourse with the governments of the world:—"Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God, the things that are God's."

The apostles, at the same time, gave many strong intimations of the corruptions which would arise in the church at a future period, as appears from the following passages of their epistles. The apostle Paul having delivered to the elders of the church at Ephesus, a solemn warning to take heed to themselves, and to the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers, immediately adds, as the reason of it;

“ For I know this, that after my departure, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock : also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” The fear and jealousy which he entertained concerning the policy and influence of false teachers, is thus expressed : “ But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve, through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” For such corrupters “ are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ ; and no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light ; therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness.” The apostle Peter gives suitable caution against the baneful influence of such false teachers. “ But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom, the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandize of you, whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.” To these passages might be added many others, by which the apostles warn the primitive churches of the approaching dangers arising from false teachers. The true character of these apostates is delineated in these words : “ This know also, that in the last days, perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God ; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.”

The primitive Christians acknowledged no man on earth to be head of the church. All the princes of the world were *Pagans* and *enemies* to Christianity ; consequently, spiritual supremacy, as a qualification of princes, had no existence. History bears the strongest attestation to the fact—the fact which all acknowledge, that for ages, the Christian churches

and their pastors knew nothing of supremacy and headship, but maintained an undisputed independence. The unimpeachable documents of antiquity totally confront the daring assumption on this point, and leave every unbiassed mind in a state of the utmost astonishment at the boldness of the claim, the arrogance of the sentiment, and the impiety of the practice. When will the inhabitants of Christendom recover the use of their senses, and show themselves to be men, by discarding the grossest imposture, and delivering themselves from the worst despotism that ever enslaved this part of the creation of God?

To prevent Christians from ever ascribing this extravagant power and pride to any mortal, the disciples of Christ received the following decisive prohibitions from their Lord and Master:—"The kings of the Gentiles," says he, "exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But YE SHALL NOT BE SO: but he that is greatest among you, let him be the younger; and he that is *chief*, as he that doth *serve*."—"Be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon earth; for one is your Father which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters; for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is *greatest* among you shall be your *servant*. And WHOSOEVER SHALL EXALT HIMSELF SHALL BE ABASED; and HE THAT SHALL HUMBLE HIMSELF SHALL BE EXALTED."

In exact conformity, therefore, to the high authority of these injunctions, were both the doctrine and practice of the apostles. They combated the spirit of imposition, exhorting the people to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, and not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage." In their practice, they openly refused to "have dominion over their faith, but to be helpers of their joy;" they were neither concerned to promote their own secular interest, nor to force their faith and practice upon the people. They sought not theirs, but them;—not their temporal favours, but the salvation of their souls.

SECTION II.

The Liberty of the ancient British Churches subverted by Imperial Oppressions.

THE Churches planted by the apostles were not subject to any foreign jurisdiction, but were all governed by the laws of Christ; they were absolutely uncontrolled and uninfluenced by secular considerations, being founded upon a basis far more secure than any human policy or power, and for purposes far superior to those of any human or political institutions. No doctrine of the New Testament, as before stated, can be more conspicuous than the voluntary association of these Christian societies, and the right of private judgment as claimed and exercised by their respective members; it is equally conspicuous, that those primitive institutions, founded on the sole authority of Christ, had no other object in view than the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the salvation of the souls of men. As to the rights and immunities of the churches at this early period, says Mosheim, "nothing can be more evident than the perfect equality that reigned among those churches; nor does there appear, in the first century, the smallest trace of that association of provincial churches, from which councils and metropolitans derived their origin."* The primitive churches, says Burnet, had no human laws in their favour, but many against them; and their suffering patiently so many persecutions according to the laws of the empire under which they lived, was conformable to the doctrine laid down by the apostles.†

The inquisitive reader will, no doubt, be particularly desirous to know when the Sun of Righteousness *first* arose upon our island, and by whose missionary labours the Gospel of Christ was *first* proclaimed to the ancient Britons. At that early period, we discover, with melancholy precision, the gloomy horrors of the long night in which our ancestors wandered, before the beams of divine Revelation darted upon

* Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 107.

† Burnet's Speech, p. 2.

them from the East ; and could we draw a full picture of the gross ignorance, the gloomy superstition, the disgusting vices, and the accumulated miseries which then reigned in Britain, it might at once raise a blush for our humiliating origin, and influence our gratitude to Him, who “ brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel.” The naked bodies, and savage exterior of the ancient Britons, were less disgraceful than the besotted minds, and depraved hearts, which lurked within. Our forefathers practised a singular kind of polygamy, elevated very little above the promiscuous intercourse of brutes. The rude lords exercised an absolute power over the life and death of their women and children. Prisoners taken in war, and condemned criminals, they enclosed in wicker cages, and burnt alive as sacrifices to their gods ! In short, many generations of our ancestors lived in a most dismal night of barbarism, superstition, and idolatry.

The inquiry, when and by whom the light of the Gospel was first brought to this realm of night ? is a point on which ecclesiastical historians have been divided. Most of them seem, however, to agree in fixing that event before the expiration of the first century ; and the testimonies of several of the ancients have been produced in support of this opinion. Tertullian and Origen, speak of Christianity as having made its way into Britain ; nor do they represent it as a recent event ; so that it may be presumed to have taken place long before their time. But Eusebius is much more explicit ; and speaking of the pious labours of the apostles, he positively declares, that some of them “ had passed over the ocean, and preached in the British Isles.”* From his connexion with the imperial court, and his known intimacy with the Emperor himself, who was a native of Britain, he may well be supposed to have possessed the most accurate information ; and, as the strength of his reasoning on the point which he discussed, depends much on the truth of the above allegation, it may be presumed that he was well assured of the fact.† Theodoret, another ancient and respectable ecclesiastical historian, expressly names the Britons among the nations whom the apostles “ had persuaded to embrace the religion of him who

* Euseb. *Demon. Evan.* b. iii. c. 7.

† Stillingfleet's *Antiq.* p. 36.

was crucified." He also says, after having mentioned Spain, that " St. Paul brought Salvation to the Islands that lie in the ocean."*

To the foregoing testimonies, may be added that of Gildas, the earliest of all our British historians. He affirms that the Gospel began to be published in this country about the time of the memorable revolt and overthrow of the Britons under Boadicea. Speaking of this revolt, with its disastrous termination and consequences, he adds, " In the meantime, Christ, the true sun, afforded his rays, that is, the knowledge of his precepts, to this Island, benumbed with extreme cold, having been at a great distance from the sun, not the sun in the firmament, but the Eternal Sun in heaven."† This account places the introduction of Christianity in the year of our Lord, 59 or 60; which appears to be, on the whole, correct, and is remarkably supported by the " Triades of the Isle of Britain." These are ancient British documents of undoubted authority, though but little known till lately, except to a few who had access to the remaining depositories of ancient Cambrian records. From these interesting documents we learn, that the famous Caractacus, after a war of many years in defence of the liberties of his country, was basely betrayed and delivered up to the Romans, and was, together with his father, Brân, and the whole of his family, carried captive to Rome, about the year 52 or 53, where they were detained about seven years. The Gospel was, at this time, preached at Rome, and Brân with others of his family, became converts to Christianity. Having remained in captivity about seven years, they had permission to return, and were the honoured instruments of introducing the knowledge of Christ among their countrymen, at the period already mentioned; on which account, Brân was long distinguished as *one of three blessed sovereigns*, and his family as *one of the three holy lineages of Britain*.

Upon the return of these earliest British converts, it might be expected that some of the Christians with whom they had associated at Rome, would be persuaded to accompany them to their native country. Some of the disciples of Christ,

* Theodoret, tom. i. in Psal. 116; tom. iv. ser. 9.

† Gildas' Epist. c. i.

whose names are recorded in the New Testament, were probably at Rome, when they quitted that city; but it is difficult to obtain decisive evidence, that any of them did at that time visit Britain. We find, however, that certain Christians from Rome did actually accompany the liberated captives. The names of three have been preserved. One was called Ilid, who was an Israelite; the other two were, Cyndaf and Arwystli Hên, both probably Gentiles.* They all seem to have been preachers, and were instrumental in turning great numbers of the Britons from their druidical errors and superstitions, persuading them to believe in Jesus Christ. The grand object of the royal convert, and of those who accompanied him on his return, was to make known to the ancient Britons the only way of salvation, in which they seem, through the blessing of God, to have been eminently successful. These persons were the first Christian preachers, of whom we have any account, that set their feet on this Island: Brân introduced them and the Gospel to Britain.

Though the monkish legends, of Joseph of Arimathea and others bringing the Gospel first to this country, are unworthy of the least degree of credit;† yet considerable circumstantial evidence has been alleged, that Aristobulus, mentioned in the epistle to the Romans, preached the Gospel in Britain; and the Greeks say, that this preacher “was sent into England, where he laboured very much, made many converts, and at last died.”‡ If this account be correct, he most probably accompanied Brân, when he returned to his native country. He is, indeed, on strong grounds supposed to have been the Arwystli, already mentioned. As Brân was a Cambrian prince, we may safely conclude, that Christianity gained access to the mountains of Wales, as early as into any part of this kingdom.

It has been stated by those who appear to have paid the greatest attention to this part of British history, and who seem to have been best acquainted with it, that great numbers of the Druids embraced Christianity on its first promulgation in this island; and, consequently, that the Christianity of the

* Roberts' Chronicle, p. 293, 294.

† Stillingfleet, p. 10—13.

‡ Literary Panorama, vol. ii. p. 842.

Britons, in time, became tinctured with Druidism. This will not appear at all extraordinary, when we recollect how much the religion of the Jewish Christians was tinctured with Judaism, and that of the Platonic converts with Platonism. The case was no doubt similar with converts from all other sects. To men's attachment to old opinions and prejudices may be traced most of those religious differences, errors, and contentions among Christians of the first ages, if not those also of later times.

The actual progress of Christianity in Britain during the first two centuries cannot now be known with any degree of precision, only that it appears to have been successful, seeing it was sufficiently conspicuous to be noticed by African writers about the beginning of the third century. The exertions of the Romans to extirpate Druidism, on the one hand, and the divine consolations of the Gospel, on the other, contributed greatly to favour its propagation, and to aid its progress. Whilst the Romans indulged the bitterest intolerance and antipathy against Druidism, and used every means in their power to effect the total extinction of it ; the religion of Jesus was making silent, but secure progress among all ranks of society, by the attraction of converts to the doctrine of the cross. There can be no doubt that the Druids made considerable opposition to the new doctrine ; yet the faith continued its prevailing influence to the time of king Lucius, when a new period of zealous exertions in its favour appears to have commenced.*

This prince, so much celebrated by ecclesiastical historians, was a king of the Silures, and a descendent of Caractacus. The general testimony borne to his character appears to be a sufficient ground for the celebrity he acquired, by his signal services in the cause of religion. The title of sovereign of *all Britain* has been improperly assigned to this prince, as it had been to his progenitors ; for in his time there were many kings over particular cities, and no one king over the whole island. The old British government was neither popular as some pretend, nor under one monarchy ; but the people were governed by several petty princes, ruling different parts of the country.†

* Roberts' Chron. p. 296.

† Stillingfleet's Antiq. p. 65.

The following story is related of king Lucius' first embracing and promoting the Christian religion. He sent Eluanus and Medwinus to Eleutherius, bishop of the church at Rome, desiring, by means of his instruction, to be made acquainted with the Gospel. Upon which the latter gave thanks to God, that such a noble prince so much desired Christianity; and then, by the advice of the presbyters at Rome, they first baptized these ambassadors, and, being instructed, they ordained them, making Eluanus a bishop or pastor, and Medwinus a teacher. So they returned to king Lucius, who, with the chief of the Britons, was baptized; and then, according to the instructions of Eleutherius, Christian churches were organized, bishops were ordained, and the Christian religion was taught and propagated.*

This story may, on the whole, be true. The two ambassadors themselves were no doubt British Christians; and having been employed in recommending the new doctrine to king Lucius, he sent them to Eleutherius for further instruction. Knowing the great fame of Rome, and hearing of the flourishing state of the Christian church in that city, he wished to ascertain how far the British Christians agreed with those of Rome: and he might reasonably presume, that the Christian doctrine was there taught in its greatest purity, being the place of resort from all other parts of the empire, and the very place where some of the apostles had preached the Gospel. These considerations might reasonably move king Lucius to send his embassy to Rome.

This prince held some further correspondence with Eleutherius, from whom, in answer to his inquiries, he received the following useful instructions: "You have desired us to send you a copy of the Roman and imperial laws, with a design to make them the rule of justice in the realm of Britain. As for the imperial laws, we may dislike and disapprove them at any time, but the law of God is above all censure and exception. I mention this because, through the mercy of God, you have lately received the Christian religion in the kingdom of Britain; so that now you have the privilege of consulting both the Old and New Testament. Out of these volumes you

* Stillingfleet's *Antiq.* p. 66.

may, by the advice of your subjects, collect a body of laws, which, under God's protection, may enable you to govern your people. Christian subjects, who live in peace and tranquillity under your protection, and sheltered by your administration, are cherished as the Scripture speaks, 'as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings.' The people of Britain are your subjects, and committed to your care, amongst whom it is your part to promote unity and good understanding, to bring them to a submission to the Gospel, and into the bosom of the church; to restrain them from disorder, and to support, govern, and protect them from the insults of injurious malice."*

In conformity to these excellent instructions, Lucius laudably exerted himself to diffuse Christianity in all directions, and to promote the conversion of his subjects, not by any methods of coercion, but only by the simple preaching of the Gospel.† His zeal was great and effective; so that many of the British churches, and probably some on the continent, owed their formation or confirmation, under God, to his munificent exertions. But by the formation of these ancient churches we are not to understand the imposition of Christianity by the secular power, or any attempt to force religion upon the people by civil coercion and penal laws. Nothing could be more remote from the thoughts, intentions, and efforts of king Lucius; whose zeal in this cause was tempered with prudence, and consisted wholly in recommending and persuading his subjects to embrace the Gospel, allowing them at the same time the most perfect liberty of conscience.

No doubt can be entertained that the Christianity of these first ages was in its purest form, being received on conviction, and from choice, not imposed by the force of human edicts and temporal penalties. The important fact is acknowledged even by all the Romish writers, that it continued to maintain its unsullied purity in Britain, down to the time of Dioclesian. As the *purity of the faith* signifies in *their* vocabulary its *agreement with that of the church of Rome*, this is a very important concession; for it was not till the next age, that Rome began to vary from her former self; upon which, the

* Collier, vol. i. p. 14.

† Fox, vol. i. p. 119.

British churches *not* varying, thus became different, and were considered as corrupted. Whereas the British churches preserved Christianity for many ages more pure than any other churches in Christendom.*

It has been assumed, that the adoption of Christianity was, at least from the time of Lucius, universal throughout the island of Britain. But this is an assumption neither rational in itself, nor favoured by any analogy in the course of events, not even in the experience of the apostles. Were it to be admitted that the Roman policy of extirpating the Druids was continued, that Christianity was publicly favoured, and that many of the Druids themselves took shelter under its peaceful shade, which no doubt was the case; and if we conclude even that the majority of the Britons became Christians, it would be highly honourable to the country, and certainly full as much as could reasonably be expected. Be this, indeed, as it might, we find that the necessary officers of the primitive churches were appointed; the doctrines of the churches were simply apostolical; the rites no more than the two appointed by our Lord; and the exercise of public instruction and public worship duly observed.

To the close of the third century, the British churches existed and prospered without the alliance of the state. The religion of Christ, throughout this period, obtained success on the ground of its own amiable attractions. The Christian churches during these purest ages were founded on conviction, and the voluntary association of the parties concerned, to the exclusion of every species of imposition, coercion, and interference from others. For the preservation of peace and unity among them, it was usual to advise in important cases with the bishops or pastors of other churches, and chiefly with those of the greatest reputation, who gave their judgment, not by way of *authority*, but of *friendly correspondence*; not to exercise any dominion over the faith of their brethren, but to show their concern to preserve the peace and purity of the churches of Christ.† This is a most important concession, supported by indubitable facts. So that, as to the Christians themselves,

* Roberts' Chron. p. 300.

† Stillingfleet's Antiq. p. 128.

this was the age of unrestricted and perfect religious freedom : their only danger arose from blind and superstitious Pagans.

Britain was now reduced to the condition of a Roman province, and the public profession of Christianity depended upon the connivance of the Roman governor or governors for the time being. Christians had it not in their power to oppress and persecute their fellow Christians : none but Pagans could make inroads and encroachments on their religious rights. It was particularly providential for the British churches, whether owing to their distance from the seat of government, to the clemency of their provincial governors, or to some other cause, that they were long strangers to those violent oppressions which afflicted less favoured provinces of the empire. When persecution raged furiously in Gaul, our sequestered isle was the asylum of religious liberty. At length, however, the Britons were marked out by the emperor Dioclesian to drink a portion of those bitter ingredients, which he poured out upon all parts of the empire. It is marvellous and almost incredible what numbers of innocent Christians were tormented and slain : some with the sword ; some burnt in the fire ; some scourged with whips ; some stabbed with forks ; some fixed on gibbets ; some drowned in the sea ; some had their skins plucked off ; some their tongues cut out ; some were stoned to death ; some destroyed by cold ; some starved with hunger ; some had their hands cut off, or otherwise dismembered, and left naked to the open shame of the world ; yet in all these torments their piety and constancy remained unshaken.* Whilst the good people were thus carried as sheep to the slaughter, their places of worship were demolished ; and the copies of the holy Scriptures were sought after, and, when discovered, publicly burnt ; insomuch, that in some provinces there were scarcely any traces of Christianity remaining. To accomplish these infamous designs against our ancestors, Dioclesian sent Maximian Herculus into Britain.†

This monster of iniquity, Dioclesian, who commanded himself to be worshipped as God !‡ boasted of having blotted out the Christian name ; and it is manifest from our ecclesiastical

* Fox, vol. i. p. 38.

† Roberts' Chron. p. 96.

‡ Stillingfleet's Antiq. p. 70.

records, that his diabolical edicts succeeded to a very great extent. Impious man! proud boaster! though in that bloody slaughter, Christianity *almost* disappeared in *some* parts; yet after these desolations many Christians still remained in Britain. St. Alban, our proto-martyr, fell in the dreadful carnage. His kindness in sheltering a Christian preacher from the fury of persecution, by affording him refuge in his house at Verulum, was graciously rewarded by his conversion to the faith of Christ. He sealed his profession with his blood; and the earliest historians of that event, among other miraculous circumstances with which they embellish the story, affirm that the eyes of the executioner dropped from his head, instantly as he gave the fatal blow. The place was afterwards called St. Albans, in honour of the martyr.*

Persecution, however, cannot suppress the truth. It may depress it, or check its progress for a season—it may murder its advocates and professors; but “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Ancient writers have compared Christianity to the palm-tree, which, the old naturalists say, rises in proportion to the weights with which it is loaded. Justin Martyr, addressing the emperors, said, “We desire a fair trial, and no favour: if we are guilty, punish us; if we are innocent, protect us. We do not desire you to punish our calumniators: their own ignorance and wickedness is punishment enough.” He then adds: “We are slain with the sword; we are crucified; we are cast to the wild beasts; we are bound with chains, tortured and burnt; yet we are not only constant to our profession, but we increase and multiply: the more we are persecuted and destroyed, the more are added to our numbers. As a vine, by being pruned and cut close, puts forth new shoots, and bears greater abundance of fruit; so it is with us, who are the vine which God and his Christ have planted.”†

The foregoing barbarous enormities afterwards subsided through the clemency of Constantius Chlorus, governor of Britain, who, in the year 305, was placed on the imperial throne. Though he lived and died a Pagan, he surpassed all others in “clemency and goodness towards his subjects,” and

* Fox, vol. i. p. 98.

† Jortin's Remarks, vol. i. p. 336.

allowed the Christians the perfect liberty of their religion, protecting them against injury and persecution. The love of justice, and the exercise of tolerance, were ranked among the most prominent traits in his character, and not improper for the imitation even of Christian princes.*

It is related of this prince, that wishing to distinguish his courtiers who were Christians, and try their probity, he pretended to be an enemy to their religion, and commanded them all to offer sacrifice to the gods, upon pain of his displeasure, and the forfeiture of their places. The men of principle, who made conscience of their religion, told him plainly, that they must resign their offices; for they valued the favour of God, much more than the favour of any prince: but the licentious part of the court, who had taken up the profession of Christianity merely because it was become fashionable, when they found it discountenanced and opposed by the emperor, signified their readiness to sacrifice to the Pagan deities, rather than relinquish their secular interest. Constantius, upon this, gave them a severe reprimand, and dismissed them from their employments: declaring that he had no opinion of men of such mercenary dispositions, who were governed wholly by self-interest, and, since they had shown themselves to be false to their God, they would not be faithful to their prince. As to the others, who were willing to part with all for Christ, he commended them highly for their integrity, esteemed them among his best friends, and gave them an important share in the public administration.† This may afford a useful lesson to private Christians, as well as to princes, not to sacrifice their honour and their consciences to the flattery of superiors, lest those superiors treat them with infamy and contempt.

The fourth century produced a revolution in the state of religious freedom, which placed the churches of Christ in circumstances nearly the reverse of the apostolic churches mentioned in the New Testament. Constantine the Great, son of Constantius, who, in the year 306, succeeded to the imperial dignity, effected a complete change in the religion of the empire. Our country has been pronounced happy beyond

* Euseb. Eccl. Hist. b. viii. c. 14.

† Euseb. Constan. b. i. c. 11.

all others, in giving birth to Constantine, the first Christian emperor.*

This prince had, indeed, been for some time an indignant spectator of the savage cruelties inflicted by the hands of the Roman soldiers, on those citizens whose religion was their only crime. His father having recommended indulgence to the Christians by the authority of his dying breath, Constantine gave early indications of a desire to protect and favour them. These tolerant principles were extended alike both to Pagans and Christians, even before the emperor avowed any peculiar attachment to the latter. At the period of his accession, he had not discarded paganism ; and some time after, when engaged in his preparations to give battle to Maxentius, he deliberated with himself to what deity he should address his supplications for aid and success in that warfare.† On the defeat of Maxentius, a proclamation was issued by the joint emperors, Constantine and Licinius, for the protection of every description of religionists, Pagans and Christians, leaving them in the free and full possession of that liberty to which they had a natural and an equal claim. As this document, issued by these Pagan monarchs, exhibits the only proper ground on which princes can, with any degree of propriety, attempt to regulate the religion of their subjects, the perusal of it will no doubt be gratifying to the reader.

“ Weighing with ourselves, that the liberty and freedom of religion ought not in any case to be prohibited, but that free leave ought to be given to every man to do therein according to his mind and will ; we have given commandment to all men to qualify matters of religion as they themselves thought good, and that also the Christians should keep the opinions and faith of their religion. But because that many and sundry opinions by the same our first license, spring and increase through such liberty granted, we thought good to add thereunto and make plain such things whereby some of them in time to come may be let or hindered. When therefore by prosperous success, I, Constantinus Augustus, and I, Licinius Augustus, came to Mediolanum, and there sate in council upon such things as served for the utility and profit of the

* Stillingfleet's *Antiq.* p. 90.

† Euseb. *Constan.* b. i. c. 21.

commonwealth, these things amongst others, we thought, would be beneficial to all men ; yea, and before all other things we purposed to establish those things wherein the true reverence and worship of God is comprehended : that is, to give unto the Christians free choice to follow what religion they think good, and whereby the same sincerity and celestial grace, which is in every place received, may also be embraced and accepted of our loving subjects.

“ According therefore unto this our pleasure, upon good advertisement and sound judgment, we have decreed, that no man be *so hardly used, as to be denied to choose and follow the Christian religion* ; but that this *liberty be given to every man*, that he may apply his mind to what religion he *thinketh meet himself* ; whereby God may perform upon us all his accustomed care and goodness. To the intent, therefore, that you may know that this is our pleasure, we thought it necessary to write this unto you, whereby all such errors and opinions being removed, which in our former letters, being sent to you in behalf of Christians, are contained, and which seem very indiscreet and contrary to our clemency, may be set aside and annihilated. Now, therefore, we firmly and freely will, and command, that *every man have free liberty to observe the Christian religion, and that he may do the same, without any grief or molestation.*

“ These things have we thought good to signify unto you by as plain words as we may, that we have given to the Christians *free and absolute power* to keep and use their religion. And for as much as this liberty is absolutely given by us unto them, to use and exercise their former observances, if any be disposed, it is manifest that it helpeth much *to establish the public tranquillity* of our time, for every man to have license and liberty to choose and exercise what kind of worship he himself listeth. This is done by us, to the intent *that we would have no man to be enforced to one religion more than another* ; and this thing amongst others we have provided for the Christians, that they may regain the possession of those places, in which they have heretofore been accustomed to hold their assemblies ; so that if any have bought or purchased the same either of us, or of any other, the said places without money or recompense, shall forthwith and without

delay, be *restored to the said Christians*. And if any man have obtained the same by gift from us, and shall require any recompense to be made in that behalf, then let the Christians repair to the president (being the judge appointed for that place) that consideration may be had of them by our benignity: all which things we will and command, that you see given and restored freely, and with diligence, unto the society of the Christians, all delay set apart.

“ And because the Christians themselves are understood to have had not only those places wherein they were accustomed to resort together ; but also certain other peculiar places, not being the property of any one man, but belonging to their congregation and society, you shall see *all those also restored* to the Christians ; that is to say, to every fellowship and company of them, according to the decree now given, all delay set apart. Provided that the order we have taken, be observed, that if any taking recompense, shall restore the said lands and possessions, they shall not mistrust, but be sure to be saved harmless by us. In all these things, it shall be your part to employ your diligence in the behalf of the foresaid Christians, whereby this our commandment may speedily be accomplished, and also in this case by our clemency, the public peace may be preserved. For undoubtedly by this means, the good-will and favour of God shall always continue with us. And to the intent that this our constitution may be notified to all men, it shall be requisite that a copy of these our letters be set up in all places, that all men may read and know the same.”*

Thus Constantine's first care was, “ to secure *full liberty* to the Christians.”† In this admirable, imperial edict, we at once perceive that the subjects of the empire were not to be molested for their religion, whether that religion were Christianity or Paganism, but every one was left to the arbitration of his own mind. No force was to be applied to conscience. Protection was afforded, without respect to religious profession, equally to every subject of the empire ; and religion was treated as a personal concern, with which the civil power might not

* Fox, vol. i. p. 95.

† Stillingfleet's Antiq. p. 74.

interfere. This document appreciates the indubitable rights and liberties of mankind, and might not be an improper model for kings and emperors in modern times. If the rights, which it recognizes and establishes, be founded in justice, then it undeniably follows, that every opposite measure, whether from Constantine or any other, must be an open violation of justice. It was strictly within the limits of the emperor's authority, to assure all the subjects of the empire, of secure protection and impartial usage in the exercise of their religion. Constantine had not yet learned to rule the consciences and souls of his subjects: these he left, as they ought ever to be left, in the uninterrupted possession of their native liberty. In conformity to this happy change, the Christians enjoyed quietness from persecution, their places of public worship, before demolished, were re-built, and the worship of God observed, without the least disturbance.* These were the days of perfect religious liberty.

Constantine, not long after, addressed his subjects by letter, expressing the clemency and liberality of his sentiments, as follows:—"Those who err, and are out of the way, enjoy the benefit of peace and quietness, with and amongst the number of the faithful; and, I trust, the restitution of the Christians may be a means of bringing those who err, into the perfect way of verity. Let no persons, therefore, be grievous one at another, but what every man thinketh best, that let him do: for such as are wise, ought thoroughly to be persuaded, that they only mean to live holily, and as they should do, whom the Spirit of God moveth to take their delight and recreation in reading his holy will; and if others will wilfully go out of the way, cleaving to the synagogue of false doctrine, they may at their own peril. As for us, we have the most worthy house or congregation of God's verity, which he, according to his own nature and goodness hath given us; and this we wish unto them, that, with similar participation and common consent, they may feel with us the same delectation of mind.—We give thee thanks, O Lord most mighty, that all mankind have not been destroyed. Surely as thy benignity and gentleness are manifested by

* Collier, vol. i. p. 25.

sundry benefits bestowed upon us, so much also is the same set forth and declared in the discipline of thy eternal Word, to those who are heavenly-minded, and apply themselves to the attainment of sincere virtue. But if any such there be that have little regard or consideration thereof, let them not blame others; for that physic whereby health is obtained, is manifestly offered unto all men. Now, therefore, let no man attempt to subvert that, which experience itself doth show to be good. Let us all use this benefit bestowed upon us; that is, the benefit of peace and tranquillity, setting apart all controversy. And let no man hurt or prejudice his fellow, for that wherein he thinketh himself to have done well. If, by what any man knoweth, and hath experience of, he thinketh he may profit his neighbour, let him do the same; if not, let him decline it till another time; *for there is great diversity between the willing and voluntary embracing of religion, and when a man is thereto enforced and coerced.*"*

On another occasion, the emperor addressed his subjects in these words:—"God hath many ways declared his omnipotent power, both in stirring me up to undertake his cause, and prospering my endeavours; so that the whole world, which before groaned under affliction and tyranny, hath, by God's power aiding me, been set at liberty, and enlightened with the knowledge of religion.—Let no man molest another; but let every one follow the persuasion of his own conscience. Let those who have a true opinion concerning God, be persuaded, that such as regulate their lives by the rule of God's sacred laws lead a most holy and upright life; but those who will not be conformable thereunto, may have liberty to erect their altars. We will maintain the church and true religion; and we desire, that others may joyfully receive this general offer of peace and concord.—Let no man, in that which he is persuaded is right and good, give any offence to another; but rather let him that hath knowledge and understanding, endeavour to instruct and convert his neighbour. But if he cannot, let him give it over. *For it is one thing to embrace religion willingly, and another to be compelled through fear of punishment.*"† These are admirable sentiments; and the em-

* Fox, vol. i. p. 113.

† Euseb. Constan. b. ii. c. 41, 55, 59.

peror could not have more decisively stated and defended the religious rights and liberties of his subjects.

Constantine having favoured Christianity, became exceedingly zealous in the cause. To promote it by every means in his power, seemed to be one great end of his life and government; but, as he very much mistook the real nature of the religion he espoused, so he completely failed in the proper means of recommending it to others. His conduct in this respect was the more unhappy, because it formed a precedent to succeeding princes, who have admired and applauded him as the great example for their imitation.

This mighty prince contradicted and violated his own edicts. Affecting to be convinced of the folly and impiety of the Pagan superstitions, he at first earnestly exhorted his subjects to embrace the Gospel; but afterwards he employed all the force of his authority, to abolish the ancient worship, and to establish Christianity as the religion of the empire. He made Christianity a state religion, by putting himself at its head, and promulgating laws for its government and support. His zeal in the cause of religion, augmented with his years; and he issued several imperial edicts for the demolition of the Pagan worship, and the prevention of sacrifices upon their altars. He was, on the other hand, scrupulously observant of the numerous rites and ceremonies prescribed by his Christian clergy, solemnly protesting himself a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The emperor, however, did not suddenly adopt these measures: for some time, he considered those who dissented from his imperial church, as actuated only by folly, and under the delusions of Satan; therefore he deemed them more worthy of pity, than of punishment; because, said he, "as it showed clemency to grieve for them; so to punish madmen, was extreme madness." Had Constantine stopped here, his liberal principles and unsullied reputation would have been the admiration of posterity. But having by imperial force suppressed the Pagan worship,* he next proceeded to extirpate all error and heresy from the empire; for which purpose, he issued his royal mandates, and sent them for execution to the

* Euseb. Constan. b. ii. c. 44. b. iii. c. 47.

governors of the different provinces. In one of these documents, he threatened, in the following lofty tone, to inflict public punishment on all delinquents :

“ We enact and command by this law, that none of you shall dare hereafter to meet at *conventicles* : therefore we command that all those places, where you were wont to keep those meetings, shall be *demolished* ; and if any of you care for the true and sincere religion, let them return to *the catholic church*, and be partakers of its holiness. For it is agreeable to that prosperous and flourishing state which we by God’s providence enjoy, that they who live in this age of knowledge and hope should be converted from the blindness of error to the right way, from darkness to light, from ignorance to truth, and from death to salvation : and that our careful providence, for curing these errors, may be more powerful and effectual, we have commanded, that all your superstitious places of meeting, and all your heretical temples, shall, without delay or contradiction, be *pulled down*, and *confiscated to the catholic church* ; and it is enacted and commanded, that there shall be no such meetings or assemblies, after this day, in any place, public or private.”*

Constantine’s bigoted intolerance prompted him to become a destroyer of public property, and a plunderer of other men’s goods, not to say openly to commit the sin of sacrilege ; yet his episcopal biographer passes the highest encomiums on his *clemency* and *goodness* ; and without hesitation declares, that he governed his subjects in “ peace and tranquillity,” reigning “ graciously and mildly, like an indulgent father, carefully providing for them ! ”† The truth is, by the suppression of one sect of religionists, and the exaltation of another, under the influence, and by the force of imperial edicts, Constantine invaded the throne of Christ, subverted the original constitution and liberties of the churches, despoiled them of their native simplicity, and generated those evil tempers amongst their members, which, in every age, have been the unfailing source of pride, contention, and every evil work.

No historical fact can be more conspicuous, than that this Christian prince directly interfered with the concerns of the

* Euseb. Constan. b. i. c. 38. b. iii. c. 63.

† Ibid, b. i. c. 9.

churches of Jesus Christ ; and that he made new laws, and enacted new penalties for the direction and government of Christianity, is equally incontrovertible as any fact recorded in history : but it is indispensably necessary to ask what right or authority had he for doing this ? When and by whom was he invested with this high magisterial power ? If God conferred this high authority upon him, there must exist some proof of it ; let this proof be produced. It will never be doubted, that the papal power has interfered with the concerns of the church, by issuing new laws and new penalties in religion ; nor will it be questioned, that, as in the case of Constantine, it has actually compelled the nations to receive the prescriptions of its authority, and to do homage to its will. Has it not asserted its control over the church, and exercised at its pleasure the power of ruling the understandings and consciences of the people ? Constantine claimed and exercised the same power, and thus usurped the throne, and claimed the prerogative of God.

If the jurisdiction, assumed by this sovereign prince, be acknowledged to have been on the whole, legitimate, who was to determine the limits within which it ought to have been confined ? Who was to be the judge of its proper range ? Were the boundaries according to which this interference ought to have been restricted or enlarged, any others than those which the sovereign will of this prince should assign ? He was himself, to the exclusion of every other party, the judge of what was proper. He alone was to determine when this interference should be exerted, and when it should be withheld. The acknowledgment of Constantine's right to interfere in choosing and appointing a religion for all his subjects, therefore amounts to nothing less than an allowance of his authority to do what he pleased ; and it is evident, that no other account can be given, why he ruled the churches of Jesus Christ, than that it was his sovereign pleasure so to do.

But mark the consequence of this acknowledgment. If Constantine had a right to rule the churches of Christ, because he possessed the means of coercing their members, every person, capable of exerting the same force, must possess a title to ecclesiastical dominion equally legitimate. Galerius, predecessor of Constantine, published an edict, in which he

commanded the subjects of the empire, who had embraced Christianity, to return, upon pain of death, to the religion of their Pagan ancestors. So it will undeniably follow, that if Constantine was right, as the supreme secular magistrate in interfering with religion, Galerius could not be wrong. The argument will not be weakened by affirming, that Galerius was a Pagan, but Constantine a Christian. For, if to control religion was a right belonging to the imperial throne, it was as much the right of Galerius to demand obedience to his edicts, as it could be the right of Constantine to prescribe by his mandates. Thus it was established, by the same rule, that to persecute Christians at one time, and to spare them at another, were equally to be commended as legitimate acts ; that whether they were tortured and destroyed, or suffered to exercise their discipline and worship undisturbed, it was the same as matter of equity ; especially since it was evident, that the persecution of Christians by a heathen emperor, was as just a proceeding as the persecution of any sect of Christians, or even of Pagans, by a Christian emperor : that is to say, both these emperors exercised a jurisdiction over the religious opinions and professions of their subjects, according to their own will and pleasure. “ Whom they would they slew, and whom they would they kept alive ; whom they would they set up, and whom they would they put down.” Such are the absurdities and mischiefs, the usurpations and oppressions, into which men plunge, when they recognize any human power as possessing authority to interfere with the consciences of men and the service of God.

The emperor, Constantine, frequently asserted, that the care of the church was committed to him, and the conduct of his clergy proves that they believed him. But the great question is, by whom, and by what instrument of conveyance, was this care committed to him ? Historians and other writers who have maintained this sentiment, certainly ought to have produced the document by which this authority was conveyed ; and till it be produced, since the whole system of ecclesiastical authority rests upon it, the people will not, surely, suffer themselves to be mislead into the worst kind of slavery, on the slender ground of their confident assertions only. As this document could be nothing less than a divine

communication or warrant, the production of it would give the fullest satisfaction, and all objections to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the crown, in the early ages of Christianity, would be at once silenced.

The only proof, however, that the care of the church was committed to Constantine, is the emperor's own assertion. This kind of proof makes strange work when applied to other cases. His holiness of Rome asserts with equal confidence, that to him the care of the church is committed, and he announces himself to the world as the vicegerent of Jesus Christ. Let protestants then examine well on what ground they stand. Did not the conduct of the clergy prove that they believed what Constantine affirmed? Doubtless! And does not the conduct of the catholic clergy prove that *they* believe what the pope affirms upon the same point? This most admirable argument has been employed almost universally by historians and ecclesiastics, and alas! the people have ever believed it; but protestants surely ought to expect something more firm and stable than this mere affirmation, to warrant the submission of their consciences to any human authority whatever. Till we are favoured with a new revelation from heaven, introducing a new economy, and giving new instructions on the subject of religious obedience, we must steadfastly adhere to the laws already given, and call no man master, in matters of religion, save Jesus Christ.

It will be of no avail to plead the practice under the Jewish theocracy, the *jus divinum* of the magistrate's office, the system of expediency, or any other consideration equally slender and inapplicable. Constantine's interference with the concerns of religion required an unequivocal charter from heaven, authorizing him to make new laws and new penalties in the churches of Christ, to establish and enforce religion by methods of coercion, and to make such alterations and improvements of Christianity as to him should seem most eligible. Neither this prince nor any of his successors, unless they received such charter directly from God, could claim and exercise dominion over the religion of their fellow-creatures, without the worst kind of presumption and usurpation, involving themselves in the guilt of persecution.

Constantine holding solely the reins of power, the professed

ministers of Christ, already secularized in spirit, and aspiring to worldly pre-eminence, obtained access to his presence, and ingratiated themselves in his esteem. While he assumed the high office and authority of prescribing the faith of the empire, his obedient clergy bartered their independence for the possession of his favour. Instead of maintaining an erect posture as men, and deciding all theological inquiries for themselves, they solicited his attention to their controversies, and made him the arbiter of their differences, not because he was *wise*, but because he was *powerful*. They flattered him into a persuasion that he had a right to exercise an absolute supremacy over all the Christian communities in the empire. The most extravagant panegyrics were lavished upon him, and his unworthy adulators ascribed to him the honours and prerogatives of the divinity. The office of prescribing to the faith of mankind, and of judging offences against the Gospel, which the invisible Head of the church had hitherto challenged as exclusively his own, was now accounted proper for a mortal! Constantine became the judge of heresy. He summoned and presided in ecclesiastical councils. He published rescripts and issued edicts, not as formerly, to assure the subjects of the empire of secure protection in the exercise of their religion, but to denounce religious opinions, and to threaten the infliction of tremendous punishments against all persons, whose tenets and discipline did not accord with his imperial standard. “Why,” exclaims the emperor, in an edict against certain dissenters from his church, “why should we bear any longer with your impieties! You shall not dare in future to meet together!—you are deprived of the places in which you have been accustomed to assemble.”

This is undoubtedly the language of princely authority. “But,” says a pious historian, “neither in Constantine, nor in his favourite bishops, nor yet in the general appearance of the church, can we see much of the spirit of godliness: Pompous apparatus, augmented superstitions, and unmeaning forms of piety, much show and little substance appears. External piety flourished; and monastic societies were growing; but faith, love, and heavenly mindedness, appear very rare; yet among the poor and obscure Christians I hope there was far more godliness, than could be seen at courts, and

among bishops and persons of eminence. The doctrine of real conversion was very much lost, or external baptism was placed in its stead; and the true doctrine of justification by faith, and the true practical use of a crucified Saviour for troubled consciences, were scarcely to be seen at this time. There was much outward religion, but this could not make men saints in heart and life.”* This was the state of things when the famous council of Nice was convened by the authority of Constantine, who presided as moderator in all its deliberations; and it was by this memorable council that the Nicene Creed was received and adopted as the doctrine of the empire, when the emperor declared that whosoever refused to receive it, should be sent into a state of banishment; and though “Constantine was *disposed to give his sanction to any creed*,” those who could not conscientiously receive the one now appointed were banished from their country.†

The emperor’s proceedings against the Donatists, however, carried him to still greater lengths of absurdity. By his intolerant enactments, he not only deprived them of their places of public worship, confiscating them to the public treasury, and forbidding them to assemble for the worship of God; but he likewise sequestered the private property of those whom he had condemned, and even sentenced some of them to death; though he afterwards seems to have commuted this for a milder punishment, most probably that of exile, which some of them certainly underwent.‡

This was ecclesiastical jurisdiction, indeed! These were the proceedings of the famous emperor Constantine! the worst part of whose character was, “that, as he grew older, he grew more culpable; oppressive in his family, oppressive in the government, and oppressive by superfluous magnificence.”—But, our churchman adds, “in vain do we look either for *wisdom* or *equity* in the ecclesiastical proceedings of Constantine or any of his family.”§

It cannot be doubted that this prince interfered with the concerns of the churches of Christ: he most certainly employed his power to coerce conscience, and to punish its exercise in

* Milner, vol. ii. p. 47, 49.

† Ibid. p. 65, 66.

‡ Brown’s Inquiry, p. 14.

§ Milner, vol. ii. p. 49, 107.

religion. But whence derived he this high authority? Who committed the care of the churches into his hands? Who gave Constantine authority to pronounce the opinions of men erroneous? Who authorized him to punish men for their religious delinquency? The power which he possessed was correct, as it was exercised in the regulation of political affairs; but it was most flagitious when directed to religion, the cognizance and government of which no mortal can justly claim. He openly encroached upon the native rights of his subjects, to think for themselves, and to embrace the religion of their own choice; and was, at the same time, guilty of usurping the prerogative of Deity, by claiming to himself that spiritual allegiance and responsibility which belongs to God alone. But those Christians, who allow the divine origin of the sacred writings, and who derive their religion from this unerring source, can admit no other authority to decide for them in matters of doctrine and worship. To understand those books, they are endowed with mental faculties; and should they err, in opinion or practice, they are accountable only to the Supreme Judge of heaven and earth.

Christianity could not, in the least, be improved by Constantine's elevation to the imperial throne: its relations to man were still the same; its spirit, its doctrines, its laws being unalterable. Human power is totally unable, by any of its acts, to obtain the assent of the mind to the truth of any doctrine. This assent can be secured only on the perception of the truth of such doctrine. Hence, the Gospel, which can benefit those only by whom it is received, and on whom it has its desired influence, was committed to mankind by its Author, to take its course; to be embraced or rejected at the peril of those to whom it should be tendered. It was a most atrocious usurpation of the prerogative of Christ, as well as a most flagrant innovation on religion, when Constantine undertook to pronounce judgment upon the professors of it. The fear of incurring his wrath became the actuating principle of a hypocritical proselytism; and the hope of enjoying his favour engaged men in a false avowal of discipleship.

There is too much reason to apprehend, that, notwithstanding the laboured and gorgeous panegyrics on the emperor's piety, he was but little acquainted with the principles, and still

less influenced by the spirit of Christianity. He, indeed, could dictate his own opinion to his subjects, as the measure of the true faith; he could proclaim his intention to reduce mankind from error to truth; he could provide splendid banquets for the bishops who frequented his court, in which Eusebius could perceive a representation of the kingdom of Christ; he could erect magnificent churches, and endow them with riches; he could trust to a baptism administered almost in his last moments, and purposely deferred till the shades of death were darkening his eyes, for the purgation of the sins of his life. The contaminations of guilt which he had contracted, and the stains of blood which he had shed, were no doubt to be washed away by the sacred mysteries contained in the baptismal waters!*

Whatever might be the true character of this great prince, it was no part of his prerogative to prescribe religious tenets, and to enforce them by secular authority. The proofs of his encroachment on the rights of the churches of Jesus Christ, and of his subverting their constitutional liberties, are abundant and decisive: but religion certainly was not the proper element for human power; and truth could not be benefited by such assistance. The consequence of Constantine's officious interference in religion, says a learned writer, was, that the Christian religion, which, for three hundred years after the ascension of Christ, had been spreading over a large part of Asia, Europe, and Africa, *without* the assistance of secular power and authority, and was almost everywhere through those countries in a flourishing condition; but in the space of another three hundred years, or a little more, was greatly corrupted in a large part of that extent, its glory debased, and its light almost extinguished!†

Christianity needs no assistance from civil powers, and they never interfere with its concerns without doing mischief; yet it is not opposed, but friendly, to the secular authority of princes. Obedience to civil government is forcibly inculcated in the Gospel, and particularly exemplified in the conduct of Christians. Christ was not the rival of Cæsar, nor did he call mankind to become his disciples to engage them in contention

* Socrates, b. i. c. 26.

† Lardner's Cred. vol. viii. p. 24.

with political rulers. Christianity never presented itself in the attitude of hostility against the power of the state; but is ever friendly to the good order of society, and the office of the civil magistrate. It is uniformly the same throughout all periods in its aspect towards civil government. The secular power has, indeed, been opposed to the Christian profession as often as restraints and punishments have been inflicted upon Christians, on account of their religious sentiments. In this view the supreme secular power in the hands of Constantine and all his successors, who have claimed ecclesiastical jurisdiction, has been opposed to the Christian religion; since they have favoured only their own party with exemption from persecution. The Pagan emperors were not always persecutors of Christians; but they sometimes generously allowed their Christian subjects equal favour and protection as other subjects, while they followed the religion of their own choice.* Their forbearance, however, does not import a union between the church and the state; nor could their conversion to Christianity identify their political government with the Gospel institution, as having any power or influence over it.

No human power on earth can form a union of Christianity, and the political constitution; because the specific object of the former, is totally different and beyond the cognizance of the latter. Christianity addresses itself to men as *individuals*, never as they constitute a political body; but all civil authority, when legitimately directed, is addressed to men as a *political community*. The nature, adaptation, and influence of Christianity can be learned only from the New Testament, in which the whole will of its Founder is deposited. Christianity is so far from placing our *religious* and *political* obedience in the same class of obligations, that, in all the concerns of faith and worship, it inculcates that scrupulous and pure subjection to the will of God, which neither enforces nor yields subjection to things unrevealed: whereas the whole of our political obedience is founded on political enactments. When the Gospel is spiritually understood and cordially received, it constrains men to a consistent denial of the principle, that any authority on earth has a right to enforce reli-

* Lardner's Cred. vol. i. p. 257.

gious opinions on the consciences of men, by the aid of worldly sanctions. Christianity, in short, leaves the whole business of religion to the unbiased operation of truth and conviction. Since, therefore, neither Constantine, nor any of his successors, can furnish testimonials of their high authority from the New Testament, nor from any subsequent revelation, empowering them to preside over the dispensation of the Gospel, their compulsory acts and deeds in matters of religion, stand on record as open violations of the doctrine and spirit of Christianity, usurpations of the authority of Jesus Christ, subversions of the liberties of Christian churches, and outrageous on the consciences and rights of mankind.

The children of pride, in the Christian churches, had long beheld with wishful eyes, the distinguished honours, the immense riches, and the unrestrained pleasures, which the heathen hierarchy enjoyed by the incorporation of Roman superstitions. Fastidious ambition and lust of domination had begun to work in the breasts of many, even before the celebrated triumph of Constantine; and some of these sons of Diotrefes obtained titles of pre-eminence, and exercised dominion over their brethren. They had begun to encroach on the rights of Christians, to exercise dominion over their faith, and thus to usurp the authority of Christ. When the day at last dawned, which presented an opportunity of supplanting the Pagan establishment, is it to be imagined that men of such a spirit, and such a character, would indolently suffer the happy season to expire? No: the objects, in their view, were substantial and irresistible.

Nor had Constantine less powerful temptations. Ignorant in a great degree of the character and objects of the Christian economy; superstitiously attached to those persons who had obtained the direction of his conscience; and surrounded at all times by flatterers, who were constantly filling his ears with lectures on the meritorious services he would present to God and his church, by bestowing the spoils of the merciless Egyptians on the oppressed Israelites; he would have been more than a man, had he not fallen into the snare, which was so artfully laid for secularizing and oppressing Christianity. More accustomed to hear the clang of arms, than to attend to the cries which violence forces from the injured, he had no

time nor inclination to reflect, that even when he was laudably exerting his authority in protecting Christians from persecution, and Christianity from the insults of ignorance and malice; he himself would be guilty of the most flagrant violation of his own edicts, of the laws of Christianity, and of natural justice, by depriving his worthy subjects of those natural rights to which they were entitled as men, as Christians, and as members of the empire. Having so little acquaintance with the nature and intentions of Christianity, he was unconscious, that, while he was allying it to the political constitution, and secularizing its public teachers, he was laying a broad foundation for its corruption and utter ruin. If he had possessed the fear of God in his heart, and could have foreseen the tragic scenes which were exhibited through all the nations of Europe, during the middle ages, in consequence of his politics, he would, no doubt, have shuddered at them, and have been the first in reprobating such unrighteous and oppressive measures.

Constantine indeed was no prophet; he could only reason from analogy, and as he was instructed by his clergy, who lectured to him as follows:—Did a system of impiety, superstition and absurdity, supported only by its incorporation with the state, not only so long triumph over the efforts of philosophy, but even resist Christianity itself; and shall not that heavenly religion, resting hitherto on its own evidence alone, become greatly triumphant, by possessing the throne, swaying the sceptre, and brandishing the sword of its unworthy rival?

This was the MODEL into which the Christian churches were transformed. Christianity now changed her attire, and filled the throne of her discarded rival. The ministers of the churches raised their heads; extended their views; and became lords not only over God's heritage, but of the dominions of sovereign princes. The spirit of innovation raged. Superstition opened all her tinsel treasures. Ignorance erected her ebon throne. The doctrines of Christianity were adulterated. Its institutions were sophisticated. Offices, hitherto unknown in Christian churches, were invented; and were executed by persons, under characters not less foreign to the Christian institution than those of magician or soothsayer. So mighty

a revolution could not, indeed, have been effected without the plan of an incorporation with the state, already venerable and familiar to the multitude.

The political arrangements of the empire constituted another branch of this model. The emperors, to rivet more firmly the chains with which they had bound their ancient Roman subjects, divided it into certain districts, and these into minute parts, over which certain civil and military officers were appointed to preside, accountable to the political head of the empire. When Christianity was attempted to be incorporated with the civil constitution, the Christian church became catholic by a catholicism, *limited* only by the number and extent of the Roman provinces. This *catholic* church became as unwieldy as the empire, with which she was professedly united. It, therefore, became necessary to divide and subdivide her into parts, analogous and adjusted to the artificial divisions of the empire. These geographical partitions, according to the extent of territory, and the quality of the cities in them, were governed by patriarchs, metropolitans, and bishops, with other orders of subsidiary clergy. These government officers, like the civil and military officers presiding in the different provinces, were accountable to the emperor, as well in their clerical as their civil character. He governed the ecclesiastical branch of the empire by the use of subaltern officers, as really as he ruled the civil and military departments. This was the process of the empire; and to whatever religious opinions the emperor inclined, he dragged the churches of Christ in imperial chains to profess an attachment to the same courtly articles, and proceeded, without ceremony, to anathematize all the Christian world beside !

The Christian church was thus new-modelled, as much as possible, in conformity to the constitution and government of the state. The emperor, by these various means, unfortunately sowed the seeds of strife and contention throughout the empire, and he presently reaped the bitter fruits of his folly. "For as soon as Christianity was by law established, debates grew more violent;" and our author adds, "it is not in the wit, or in the power of man, or rather, it is an *impossibility*, to prevent diversity of opinions; since this is the

unavoidable result of human imperfection, and human liberty.”*

It was not then apprehended how great a change this new government of Christian churches, would make in the constitution of the empire. But the prelates, for the greater state and dignity in their judicial proceedings, having adopted the model and appendages of the civil judicatories, had their chancellors, commissaries, officials, advocates, proctors, registers, apparitors, &c. &c. Thence originated these phrases unheard before, *episcopal jurisdiction*, *episcopal audience*, and others of the same kind.†

Whether the adoption of these measures contributed to improve these shepherds of Christ's flock in humility, meekness, and tolerance, may be submitted to the determination of every judicious and impartial reader. It was in vain to imagine, that, as formerly, a sense of religion would operate on the minds of the people. True religion is of too delicate a nature to be rendered compatible with the measures now used for its advancement. From the moment the pastor was armed with the terrors of the magistrate, the power of religion was superseded, and the gentle voice of love was drowned in the clamour of commitments, forfeitures, and distress of goods. By the methods now adopted, those brotherly corrections and charitable interpositions, which were instituted by Christ and his apostles, degenerated into mere worldly domination. When, on the one hand, the ministers of religion thought fit to exchange that parental tenderness, which was the glory of their predecessors, for that lordly superiority which succeeded; it was a natural consequence, that, on the other hand, the amiable reverence of the child should be overwhelmed in the fearful submission of the slave. The great engine of the magistrate, is terror; that of the pastor, is love. St. Paul understood the difference, and marked it well: “The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men, apt to teach, patient and meek, not greedy of filthy lucre, no striker.” The weapons of his warfare are not carnal: he forbears threatening; does not employ temporal weapons in this spiritual warfare: his weapons are the

* Jortin, vol. i. Pref.

† Campbell's Lect. vol. i. p. 61.

soft powers of persuasion, animated with tenderness and love.*

The political regulations of the fourth century, produced a revolution in the state of religious society and of religious freedom, nearly the reverse of that appointed by Jesus Christ. The constitutional liberties of the primitive churches, originally given them by Christ, were subverted and destroyed by imperial oppressions; and these Christian societies, originally governed by the laws of Christ, were metamorphosed into political institutions, regulated by political edicts, superintended by officers provided and directed by political authority, and wholly under the cognizance and control of political government. The revolution thus effected in the constitution, laws, government, and liberty of Christian churches, has been applauded by historians and ecclesiastics in every age; but the wisdom and discrimination of such men will most assuredly be questioned, since they plunge themselves into one of the greatest of all delusions by assigning *political* duties to the same class of obligations as those which are *religious*. Custom is not unfrequently deemed a sufficient reason for the former; but it has no meaning when applied to the latter. Constantine played the tyrant over the souls of his subjects, and other sovereigns have done the same; but we are bound to reject their impious and cruel deeds, and to “stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,” refusing to be “entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

SECTION III.

The Tyrannical Usurpations of the Papacy.

FROM the first secularization of Christianity under Constantine the Great, the profession of religion assumed a character hitherto unknown in the christian world, and ecclesiastical history presents a picture of Christian churches widely different from any thing to be collected from the records of the New Testament. The authority which this prince began to exercise in the government of Christianity, was, in its conse-

* Campbell, vol. i. p. 67.

quences, most fatal to the rights of civil rulers ; but still more pernicious to the interests of true piety, and more destructive to the liberty and lives of mankind than a thousand other plagues. The lightest afflictions fell upon the churches when Pagan emperors were the persecutors of Christians : the heaviest came in succeeding ages, and the first of them descended when Constantine proclaimed himself the sovereign disposer of the religion of his subjects.

Had the emperor contented himself with only keeping the peace of society, and embracing the religion of his own choice, he had acted the part of a worthy prince ; but, not satisfied with this, he confirmed the creeds of interested and passionate men by his authority, and proceeded to the greatest extremity against those who had honesty enough to reject them. Thus, for the sake of that which the Gospel never taught, love and peace were discarded, and envy and hatred promoted by imperial authority. The emperor, in the distribution of his bounty, lavished upon his obsequious clergy worldly wealth, temporal grandeur, and spiritual dominion ; which, in their maturity, overthrew the thrones of princes, and destroyed empires and kingdoms ;—a righteous but terrible retribution !

This mighty ascendancy of power, it ought to be recollected, was the progressive attainment of several successive generations. Numerous errors, the produce of ages, and the fruit of vain philosophy, paved the way for the events which followed ; but they were in a great degree ineffectual, until the kingdom of Christ was converted into a kingdom of this world, by exalting the teachers of Christianity to the same state of grandeur, power, and affluence in the empire, as had formerly been conferred upon Pagan priests and the chief officers of the state. These pretended ministers of Jesus Christ having now a wide field opened for gratifying their lust of power, wealth, and dignity, the connexion of the Christian's faith and the cross ceased. That which followed was the kingdom of the clergy, supplanting the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The history of the church, from the accession of Constantine, to the period, when the bishop of Rome was elevated to supreme authority, discovers a progressive approximation to that state of things, denoted in Scripture by the revelation of

“ the man of sin sitting in the temple of God.” All the violent contentions, the assembling of councils, the persecutions alternately carried on by the different parties, were so many means of preparing the way for the open assumption of spiritual tyranny, with all the idolatry and superstition of the Roman hierarchy. In all these transactions, the substitution of human for divine authority; contentions about words, instead of promoting the faith once delivered to the saints; pomp and splendour of worship, in the place of primitive simplicity; and worldly power and dignity, instead of the self-denying labours of love and bearing the cross:—this baneful change progressively operated in darkening the human mind as to the real nature of Christianity, until, in process of time, it was buried and lost in the immense rubbish of human inventions.

When Jesus Christ was interrogated by the Roman governor concerning his regal authority, he said, “ MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD.” This sacred maxim is of unspeakable importance; and nearly every corruption that arose in the Christian churches, by which these heavenly institutions were disfigured and debased, may, through every period be traced to some departure from this grand and fundamental principle of Christianity. It may, therefore, be of importance to the reader, to keep his eye steadily fixed upon this sacred principle, while perusing the following pages; for that alone can enable him to trace the rights and liberties of the kingdom of Christ, amidst the labyrinths of error, delusion, and usurpation, which he will presently have to explore.”*

Towards the close of the fourth century, Gratian and Honorius concurred in their endeavours to suppress Paganism, and to substitute Christianity in its place; but none used methods so strong and severe as Theodosius, commonly called the *Great*, by those whom he favoured. His temper was violent, and his government oppressive. In order to suppress the Pagan worship, he made it a capital crime to offer its sacrifices or to attend at its altars. Being resolved to establish a perfect uniformity of religion throughout the em-

* Jones' Waldenses, p. 173.

pire, he enacted the most severe penalties against those who could not conform to his church establishment. He was supreme in all causes, civil and ecclesiastical, and he preposterously resolved to reduce all his subjects to a perfect conformity to his own religious opinions. Instead of union in Christ, the head of the church, held in mutual charity and forbearance, he determined to cut and square religion according to his own views; and to compel, by penal laws, universal submission to his own institutions.

The absurdity and tyranny of his imperial proceedings, must appear to all persons capable of sober reflection. For, admitting that irreligion and idolatry were offensive to the Almighty, he was judge alone; and these things were matters of cognizance to the magistrate only so far as they disturbed the peace of civil society. We have fifty millions of Pagan subjects in Bengal and the East, under our government and our laws; and shall the magistrate inflict pains and penalties upon them for their idolatry, or, like Theodosius, put them to death if they offer sacrifices to their gods? The emperor took the shortest way. The Pagans who sacrificed, suffered death. The erroneous had their possessions confiscated, and were banished from their country. Will these proceedings be called no compulsions, but salutary restraints? and not cruel persecution? If this was not barbarous persecution, there never was any persecution in the world. If divine truth cannot defend itself against the open attacks or insidious wiles of its enemies, such a magistracy as that of Theodosius, will form not only a feeble rampart against error, but the very defence thus made, proves the weakness rather than the strength of the fortress.

Divine truth, is perfectly capable of caring for itself, without the interference of magistrates, or any penal establishment. Theodosius had *no right* to make his religion that of the state universally, with pains and penalties on all those who scrupled his inventions. Every man in this matter, ought to have been left to his own conscience, undisturbed, so long as he continued a peaceable subject. It is an unwarrantable violation of the right of private judgment to impose religious sentiments on the subjects of any government, with pains and penalties for nonconformity: therefore, Theodosius, and all others who

have acted like him, are chargeable with the grossest abuse and perversion of power.

Libanius, still firmly attached to heathenism, presumed indeed to address the emperor, and to teach him lessons of religion and moderation: "That religion ought to be planted in men's minds by *reason*, not by *force*." The proceedings of Theodosius were opposed to the spirit and precepts of the Gospel, tending directly to debase Christianity, and to promote hypocrisy. His terrible denunciations, according to one historian, proceeded from the "best intentions," and his "clemency, liberality, and generosity were admirable:"* but another styles him "an over-bearing emperor—passionately resolved to bow the necks of his subjects to his religious opinions;—a fierce bigot, establishing uniformity of religion by the most unchristian edicts."†

The Saxons, who now reigned in Britain, are represented as fierce persecutors of religion; not because the Britons were Christians, but because the Christians were Britons. The renowned Arthur, is said to have wrought wonders of valour, and his uncle, St. David, miracles of sanctity. We may hope, however, that St. Asaph, who was at the head of the famous seminary at Bangor, laboured diligently in word and doctrine; and he is celebrated for an excellent saying, "they who oppose the preaching of God's word, envy the salvation of mankind."‡

The country was divided into seven Saxon kingdoms, called the Heptarchy; when their deplorable ignorance and idolatry excited the compassion of pope Gregory, who selected a number of monks, with the famous Austin at their head, whom he sent to preach the Gospel in Britain. Upon their arrival, they landed in the isle of Thanet, a part of the kingdom of Kent, then governed by king Ethelbert, whose queen, called Bertha, was a Christian, but he was a heathen. She had the liberty of her religion secured to her, by the articles of marriage.§

Austin immediately despatched a messenger, acquainting the king with the design of their mission; and Ethelbert, in a few days, gave them audience. The place of their meeting

* Milner, vol. ii. p. 198, 223.

† Hæwæis, vol. i. p. 321.

‡ Fuller, b. i. p. 40, 42.

§ Collier, vol. i. p. 64.

was in the open air, which the king chose, from a superstitious notion, that, if the monk brought any enchantments, they would not operate as in a covered building. When Austin had finished his discourse, the king answered him to the following purpose:—"The doctrines and promises ye have made, are indeed fair and inviting; but I am not as yet resolved to embrace them, since I cannot suddenly consent to quit that religion I have so long professed, together with the whole English nation. Yet, because ye are strangers, and come a long journey, and as it seems would impart to us the knowledge of that religion you believe to be the best, WE WILL NOT GIVE YOU THE LEAST MOLESTATION, BUT RATHER WILL PROTECT YOU, AND TAKE CARE THAT ALL THINGS NECESSARY SHALL BE PROVIDED FOR YOUR MAINTENANCE; NEITHER SHALL WE PROHIBIT YOU FROM GAINING AS MANY AS YOU CAN TO THE BELIEF OF YOUR RELIGION."* Admirable sentiments, thou wise Pagan! Happy had it been for the world and for the churches of God, if princes, calling themselves Christians, had adopted thy generous principles, and reflected them in their conduct! This would have prevented rivers of blood.

The effects of Austin's mission were presently manifest. Among its first fruits was the conversion and baptism of king Ethelbert, who testified great satisfaction at the faith and conversion of many of his subjects, whom he nourished with the greatest care and tenderness. The king would not, however, compel any of his subjects to receive Christianity; having learned, "that force and dragooning was not the method of the Gospel; that the religion of our Saviour was to make its way by argument and persuasion; to be matter of choice, and not of compulsion." He considered the church as "a distinct and independent society, and that his regalia received no diminution by leaving the church in her ancient liberty of choosing her own governors."†

These excellent and dignified sentiments would have been no disgrace to princes in a more enlightened age. How different were they from those of the *pious* Gregory, who, in his letter to this Saxon prince, recommended him to destroy the

* Echard, p. 21.

† Collier, vol. i. p. 67, 79.

property of his subjects, and to persecute them into his religion. "My illustrious son," says he, "forget not to maintain your ground, and make a suitable return to the divine bounty. Make use of the first opportunity, and exert yourself, to enlarge the pale of the church within your territories; quicken your zeal for the conversion of the country; *prosecute* the remains of idolatry, and *demolish* the temples of false worship. Engage your subjects to Christianity by good example, by encouragement, and discipline, and by all the proper instances of *terror* and persuasion." But Gregory, upon more mature consideration, made some alteration of these measures; and while he zealously urged upon the king the demolition of the Pagans' idols, he recommended the preservation of the temples as fit places for Christian worship, and the accommodation of things as far as possible to the views and prejudices of the heathen.*

Persecution is one way of converting persons to the faith; but it is most unwarrantable, and ought to be the abhorrence of mankind. It was a worse error than Druidism itself. But in this age, this diabolical spirit of persecution was the disgrace and bane of the churches. If the Druids resisted Christianity, when propagated by *force*, how far were they to be blamed? And which party was most worthy of censure? Undoubtedly the Christians. They had no permission, much less a command, to employ such unhallowed measures, which only create antipathy and revenge. The mission of Austin may be considered as a new era in the history of the British churches. They appear not to have suffered much persecution for a considerable period: but now they were destined to feel a reverse from a subtle and ambitious foe, and to prove their constancy under difficulties and distresses; which arose, not from the opposition of the heathens, but from those who called themselves Christians.

Austin having obtained considerable eminence, and being supported by the interest of king Ethelbert, endeavoured to establish an agreement with the British churches, and to bring them into a conformity to the church of Rome. To accomplish this object, a conference was appointed; when he insisted

* Collier, vol. i. 71, 73.

upon three important points: "That they should celebrate Easter at the same time as the Roman church;—administer baptism according to her usages;—and acknowledge the pope's authority over them." If they would comply with these propositions as the basis of uniformity, and assist in promoting the conversion of the Saxons, he said, he would bear with their disagreement in other matters. The delegates of the churches defended their rights, and refused to yield to any of these points; but particularly, to the pope's authority. Dinoth delivered a speech on this occasion, full of Christian magnanimity, and in the spirit of a true primitive bishop. In his own name, and in the name of his brethren, he said: "Know and be assured, that we all, jointly and severally, are in humility ready to declare our deference to the church of God, the pope of Rome, and every sincere and pious Christian; so to love every one according to his station in perfect charity, and to assist them all, by word and deed, so that they may become children of God. But as to further deference than this, we know of none which he whom ye call Pope, or father of fathers, (that is, bishop of bishops) can claim or demand. The deference which we have stated, we are ever ready to pay to him, and every Christian."*

The mild benevolence and dignified firmness of this speech, imperfect as it evidently is, are strongly characteristic, and agreeable to what is even acknowledged by the adversaries of Dinoth. It discovers so much meekness in the expression of that independence which it breathes, without the remotest idea of concession, that it must be peculiarly gratifying to every liberal mind. He leaves the inference evident and decisive; but he leaves it to be drawn by his opponent from his words, full of beauty, simplicity, and force. He firmly refuses subjection to the usurped and haughty claims of Rome; and the inflexibility of his purpose was proved by a continued resistance of the antichristian yoke.

The British churches had other reasons for refusing conformity to the church of Rome, and submission to her despotic power. Their bishops were elective. Saints and martyrs were not regarded as intercessors. Images in places of pub-

* Roberts' Chron. p. 177.

lic worship were accounted abominable. And no affinity was thought to be contracted by being sponsors.

For the noble resistance which Dinot and his brethren made against the Romish despotism, Austin denounced against them this tremendous threatening :—" Since you refuse to accept of peace with your brethren, you shall have war with your enemies ; and since you will not preach the word of life to them whom you ought, you shall suffer by their hands, the revenge of death !"* But, poor man ! he did not live to see his angry denunciation fulfilled ; for he died soon after, and left his followers to accomplish his holy wishes. The refusal of subjection to the pretended authority of Rome, was followed, as might have been anticipated, by an inextinguishable animosity on the part of the new usurpation ; and Austin's threats were soon after horribly accomplished by the massacre of the Monks of Bangor. Though Austin was dead, the massacre is justly attributed to his haughty counsels. The Saxon chiefs having received express orders to fall upon Dinot and his monastery, and punish his disobedience without delay, assembled their armed forces in the vicinity of Chester. At the same time, a great number of monks belonging to the British churches, assembled " to offer up their prayers for their countrymen." But even their prayers were offensive to Ethelfrid, commander of the hostile force, who said, " these men endeavour to engage their God against us ; and though they don't carry arms, and draw their swords, yet they fight against us with their prayers, which is as much an act of hostility as the other !†

Those who had assembled for prayer to God, were obliged to retreat to Bangor, where they summoned all their friends to their assistance. Dinot, at the same time, sent two hundred of the most prudent men to entreat Ethelfrid to spare their monastery, and offer him all their property, if he would allow them in peace to serve and praise God, especially as they had never done any thing to displease him. But, having heard their message, he commanded all these defenceless messengers to be immediately slain ; and having advanced with

* Fox, vol. i. p. 132.

† Collier, vol. i. p. 77.

his forces to the monastery, he appointed one thousand two hundred more to be put to death!*

The slaughter of so many pious Christians, must have been a great affliction to the British churches; yet those who survived this horrid massacre were not the less zealous, but more active and determined than ever. The opposite party, who employed these methods to promote the work of conversion, or who inflicted these cruelties on those who refused to join their party, must have been sunk into the very dregs of inhumanity and barbarity. The British churches being divided from the church of Rome, their liberties and privileges were protected by the mountains of Wales, to which they retired for a secure asylum, and where they preserved the spirit of independence unsubdued, till the country became united to England under a Tudor. For several hundred years, they firmly resisted the Romish usurpations, and openly refused all subjection to her haughty and tyrannical authority. But, whilst they made so noble a stand, the greater part of the churches in North Britain were induced to join the dominant party—to surrender their dearest rights—to yield themselves to the vassallage of a foreign yoke.†

Persecution, with the design of establishing papal domination in Wales, continued four hundred years. The ministers and members of these churches, were butchered, or driven into exile, and their places of worship plundered and destroyed; but, after all, this persecution completely failed to effect the object. These detestable cruelties, unhappily destroyed the religious instructors of the people, and reduced the natives almost to a savage state; but they retained the strongest abhorrence against the instruments of their ruin. Perhaps no country suffered more, if so much, in defence of pure Christianity, and the rights of conscience. The mischief of all these barbarities originated in placing too much power in the hands of domineering religionists; and it must be acknowledged by all, that uncivilized nations were never forward to persecute Christians in the first ages, or even in any others, till they found their sect attached to a political system, allowing them to aim at dominion and government.‡

* Roberts' Chron. p. 179.

† Ibid. p. 202, 323, 324.

‡ Roberts' Chron. p. 316, 327.

In these times, remarkable for darkness and oppression, certain individuals were raised up to enlighten the Christian churches, and correct their most dangerous errors. Edwin, king of Northumberland, and greatest of the Saxon kings, though a heathen, gave an instructive lesson on the principles of religious liberty. His first wife being dead, he became suitor to the daughter of the famous king Ethelbert, and accordingly sent his ambassadors to king Eadbald, her brother. Having announced the object of their embassy, Eadbald said, that it was not lawful for a Christian to marry a Pagan; an alliance with a prince of such *belief* could not be attempted without dishonouring God, and profaning their religion. Edwin, admiring the lady's fame, and not satisfied with her brother's divinity, insisted, that her religion ought to be no impediment, since she and her attendants should have the *free exercise* of it; and further, if upon examination he found her religion more excellent than his own, he would himself embrace it. Edwin's great liberality, silenced all objections, and gave satisfaction to all parties. The royal pair were soon united in the bonds of matrimony; and Edwin, after mature examination, professedly embraced Christianity; and when he was baptized, it is said, "all the nobility, and a great part of the commonalty followed his example."*

Eadbald, king of Kent, was succeeded by his son Earconbert, who was the first Saxon prince that made Paganism penal, and commanded that the idols should be destroyed, and the Pagan worship suppressed. The existence of heathenism under this prince, says our author, will be matter of less surprise, when it is recollected, that Ethelbert, his grandfather, did not compel any one to become Christian, and that Eadbald, his father, indulged the same latitude of toleration. These lenient measures might be proper enough at the first promulgation of Christianity. To give the Pagans time to examine the doctrine of the Gospel, and not hurry them by force, into a new and unheard-of belief, was only reasonable: but, he adds, after they had conversed with Christians through two successive reigns, and had been favoured with so many opportunities of conviction, this prince might now think that their

* Collier, vol. i. p. 85.

refusing to enter the Christian church, was only obstinacy and dissoluteness. This consideration, therefore, induced him to suppress the Pagan religion by the force of penal edicts. He also commanded the observation of Lent, and punished those who had the presumption to discontinue fasting before the forty days were expired.* Such were the superstition and slavery of those dark ages.

The reader cannot fail to observe, from these historical facts, the progressive accessions of power to the church. But it was reserved to Theodorus, archbishop of Canterbury, to complete England's subjection to Romish usurpation. This archprelate having made a visitation throughout that part of the island which was inhabited by the English, settled the proper time for the observation of Easter, and brought the people to a conformity to the church of Rome. In his progress through the country, he ordained bishops, and brought the form of the church to the Romish standard. So reluctant however, were the English to surrender their rights and liberties, and to yield themselves and their religion to a foreign yoke, that Theodorus was the *first* usurper to whom they universally submitted.†

Besides the fruitless attempt to engraft Christianity upon the political constitution, the religion of Jesus Christ was, in many other respects, spoiled of its original beauty and simplicity. The ministers of the meek and lowly Saviour, who at first were pastors or teachers of individual flocks, having progressively usurped power and dominion over the people, were now exalted to bishops of cities and provinces; and great numbers of useless and burdensome offices were gradually introduced into the church, particularly with a view to aggrandize the priesthood. By these progressive steps, the bishop of Rome, at length, claimed superiority over his brethren; and though the humble Gregory despised all lofty titles, his successor, Boniface, in the year 606, prevailed with the emperor Phocas, whose hands were reeking with the blood of his predecessor, to proclaim him UNIVERSAL BISHOP. The Virgin Mary was, at the same time, exalted to the throne of Deity, and venerated and worshipped as THE MOTHER OF GOD.‡

* Collier, vol. i. p. 90. † Fox, vol. i. p. 138.—Collier, vol. i. p. 100.

‡ Bale's Popes, p. 40.—Fox, vol. i. p. 631.

This mighty papal claim, which was equally chimerical and opposed to the genius of Christianity, could hardly have been advanced with any prospect of its establishment, except in an age like this, remarkable for darkness and credulity. The tyrannizing ecclesiastics erected a superstructure of priestly domination, which not only gave sanction to the papal decrees, to which obedience was required of mankind as to divine and infallible oracles ; but also made even kings and emperors feel the plenitude of that power, which they artfully established over the understandings and consciences of the people. The clergy, at the same time, turned the influence they had acquired to their own secular advantage, by a continual augmentation of their wealth, as well as their power.

To uphold and strengthen this unexampled authority, the politic pontiffs contrived to attach the monks to obedience still more devout, by encouraging them to quarrel with the other bishops, and transfer their allegiance to Rome. By this crafty measure, a vast army was enlisted to magnify the beast, and exalt his supremacy. Thus they secured the protection of their immunities, and found a more indulgent superior, than when under the nearer eye of their own immediate prelates : by this means, the insolent pontiff became 'entitled Christ's vicegerent on earth, his arrogant pretensions found a host of advocates, the most erroneous opinions were considered of equal authority with the oracles of divine truth, and refusing subjection to this wicked usurper was accounted rebellion against God. Thus wealth by degrees accumulating, and power increasing, the dominion of this prelate, grew at length to that height, which in succeeding ages directed its thunders against the proudest monarchs, and brought them to the deepest humiliation at the feet of this sovereign impostor.

The doctrine now strongly inculcated of the great merit of liberal donations to the church, poured immense treasures into the hands of the priesthood. No man, living or dying, failed to interest some saint or other in his favour : and as the opulent, the warrior, and the monarch, were usually the most profligate, and commonly guilty of the most atrocious crimes, they had it in their power to *redeem their souls*, by sharing with the church and her saints the fruits of their plunder, rapine, and murders ; by founding monasteries, building

churches, and enriching the sacred officers; who not only pronounced their absolution from guilt, and released them from the pains of hell due to their sins, but associated them in all the merits of saints and martyrs. Emperors, kings, and wealthy nobles, gave them not only gold, silver, and rich vestments, but estates, dignities, and rich tenures. Some of the bishops became dukes, counts, marquesses, invested with regalia in their own domains; administering justice; supreme in their several territories; and often heading armies which they levied in defence of their liege lord, or to decide contentions among themselves. The Roman pontiffs had the largest share of honours; and being set up as the object of prime veneration, and appealed to in most difficulties and quarrels, the wealth and power which flowed to them from a thousand channels, is almost inconceivable. Every bishop and priest gradually extended his claims over ignorance and superstition, always finding support at Rome for the most extravagant pretensions, provided that holy see was a sharer in the spoil.

The monasteries, filled with sloth, ignorance and wealth, could not but exhibit what the records of time confess, scenes of voluptuousness, ambition, contention and impurity. Notwithstanding these enormities, the monkish tribes maintained the highest pretensions to sanctity, and the monasteries were multiplied and filled with inhabitants. It was esteemed the perfection of piety to retire to these seclusions: and in those times of anarchy and confusion; when crimes of the most atrocious nature accumulated, no remedy was considered so effectual to efface all guilt, and to secure the sinner from all punishment, as to erect or inhabit these houses of perfidy and wickedness.

What the state of religion must have been amidst such multiplied abuses, from the supreme head at Rome to the lowest of the tonsured tribe, is at this period scarcely conceivable. The people ignorant, superstitious, and profligate, yielded implicit faith and obedience to their clerical superiors, who, furnishing them with absolution and passports to St. Peter, thought themselves justly entitled to the plunder which they extorted. The endless unmeaning rites and ceremonies, with the pageantry attending them, kept up a

constant Pagan rareeshow, which amused the imbecile generations of the middle ages, and diverted them from attending to the frauds and scandals of the clergy. The blind reverence for saints and relics rose to the altitude of Deity : an oath upon a bone, or a finger, or a nail of the cross, was supposed to be more solemn and binding than any simple appeal to God, the searcher of hearts. Indeed, the Scriptures of truth, and the nature of human obligation, found, in these dark ages, very miserable expositors ; while the general practice, both of priests and people, afforded the most decisive proofs of universal apostacy. The ecclesiastical canons of this period, contain melancholy evidence of the ignorance and impurity of the age : ignorance, which rendered it meritorious for the priests to know the creed and the Lord's prayer ; and impurity, which could publish such rules of virtue, as no person of common modesty could endure to read.

But even in these ages of gross darkness, a few individuals arose endowed with light and sense, to discern the abounding enormities ; with fortitude to bear their open testimony against them ; and with fidelity to seal that testimony with their blood. The general darkness was too gross to admit a full display of light ; and the dominion of priestcraft so strongly rivetted, and its power so firmly fixed, that all attempts to remonstrate against corruption, and to enlighten the minds of the people, by which the power and wealth of the priesthood might have been endangered, were entirely frustrated, and they generally terminated in the capital punishment of those who sought the desired reformation.

Ardœus, a man of tried religious character, could not keep silence ; but freely exposed and censured the depraved manners of the clergy, for which he was presently excommunicated. He formed a Christian church, or a society of persons like-minded with himself, over which he presided as their bishop : but the intolerance of the age would not suffer this deviation from the established order ; and being torn from his friends, and driven into banishment, he continued to hold fast the faithful word. The intolerant church took up arms, indeed, against all who refused implicit submission to prelati-cal usurpation.

The immortal ALFRED, after a long and bloody conflict

with the Danes, succeeded in establishing himself on the throne of Britain, which he filled with honour, equalled only by the valour by which it was acquired. For gentleness of disposition, improvement of time, and purity of manners, he is deservedly applauded. This wise prince divided the kingdom into counties, framed a body of laws for the government of his subjects, instituted the palladium of English liberty, trial by juries, and laid the foundation of parliaments. He was himself learned, and the great patron and restorer of learning. With this view, he invited many learned foreigners into his kingdom, and founded the university of Oxford. From the thickest shades of darkness, he emerged as the bright morning star. So universal was the ignorance which then prevailed, that this excellent prince complained bitterly, that from the Humber to the Thames, there was not a priest who understood the liturgy in his mother tongue; and that from the Thames to the sea, there was not one who knew how to translate the easiest piece in Latin. Alfred's private charities were equally useful as they were extensive; being directed to meliorate the minds as well as support the bodies of his subjects. He was, doubtless, the greatest monarch that ever sat on the English throne.*

William the Conqueror introduced a new dynasty, checked the pope's encroachments on the regal power, and when called upon to own himself a vassal of holy see, replied, "I hold my kingdom from none but God, and my sword." The rude soldier achieved more for the cause of religious freedom, than even the sainted Edward, called the Confessor; for he introduced a more manly independent tone, and allowed men to think and decide upon religion for themselves. He new-modelled the judicial part of the administration. And as the bishops and others were absolute judges in every shire, and their right reverend fathers in many cases shared the fines imposed for the king, William stripped them at once of their judicial power, and confined them within their own province, of attending to their ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and the care of souls.† He was so great a promoter of learning,

* Kennet, vol. i. p. 58.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 109.

which the Danish savages had almost annihilated, that he has been styled the Mæcenas of the age.

Alphage, archbishop of Canterbury, displayed the true spirit of a primitive martyr, by refusing to betray what he conceived to be the interests of the church, to the fierce persecuting Danes. "Shall I be afraid," said he, "to go to heaven, because a violent death lies in the way? I have given the enemy no just occasion to use me ill. It is true, I have converted some of the most considerable of them to Christianity; but if this be a fault, I shall be happy in suffering for it. If you think the Danes are particularly enraged against me for reproving them for their immorality and injustice, I cannot help it. I am bound to these remonstrances by my commission; and unless I give the wicked man warning, his blood will be upon my head. If this be all the provocation I have given them, I must indeed think it unbecoming my station to desert my worthy countrymen in time of danger, and make an ignoble provision for myself. What can I be less than a hireling, if when I see the wolf ready to devour my sheep, I presently run away, and leave them to shift for themselves? I am resolved, therefore, to stand the shock, and submit to the order of providence." The magnanimity of this prelate did not expire in words; nor did his valour shrink in the hour of danger. He was first dragged in chains to prison, then cruelly murdered by the Danes.*

This ferocious cruelty was not confined to the barbarous Danes. King Henry II. displayed an instance of cruelty, equally repugnant to every principle of justice and humanity. A company of about thirty men and women, who spoke the High Dutch language, attracted the attention of the government, by the singularity of their religious opinions. What these opinions were it is difficult to ascertain, as they are recorded only by their adversaries, who speak of them with great asperity. These persons being apprehended, were arraigned before a council of the clergy at Oxford, and interrogated respecting their religion. Gerard, their teacher, a man of learning, answered, that they were Christians, and believed the doctrines of the apostles. They were sufficiently orthodox concerning the trinity and incarnation; but they denied seve-

* Warner, vol. i. p. 224, 225.

ral of the received doctrines of the church. Refusing to abandon their opinions, they were condemned by their clerical judges as incorrigible heretics, and delivered to the secular power to be punished. The king commanded them to be branded with a red hot iron on the forehead, to be whipt through the streets of Oxford, and to be turned out into the open fields, forbidding all persons to afford them any shelter or relief, under the severest penalties. This cruel sentence was executed with the utmost rigour; and it being in the depth of winter, they all perished with cold and hunger !* Thus these inoffensive foreigners, who had probably left their own country to avoid persecution, suffered death in the great cause of religious freedom.

While the prince and his clergy were murdering these innocent persons, our Island groaned under the yoke of foreign despotism. The papal usurpations and oppressions had no bounds. The Roman pontiff, sent John the Franciscan to England, with the following commission :—" We charge you, that, if the major part of the English prelates should make answer, that they are exempt from foreign jurisdiction, you demand a greater sum, and *compel* them, by ecclesiastical censures, to withdraw their appeals, any privilege or indulgence notwithstanding."† This was the unbounded encroachment by which the pope, in the plenitude of his dominion, assumed to himself the same dispensing power in the Church, as king James, long after, assumed in the State. So shameless were the papal exactions in these gloomy ages, and so secure was their hold on the abject slavery and superstition of mankind, that they committed these scandalous depredations, in open violation of every principle of equity and decorum. And all men, who received not the testimony of Jesus Christ, but refused submission to his easy yoke, were induced to kiss the iron rod of the Italian Tyrant.

The nation groaning under this intolerable despotism, ages were spent in fierce and haughty conflicts of the prelates; sometimes with each other, and sometimes with their natural prince. Ecclesiastics claimed exemption from civil jurisdiction, and a right of appeal to Rome. But while the king, with

* Collier, vol. i. p. 348.

† Milner, vol. iv. p. 5.

much justice, opposed this priestly exemption from the laws of the country, Thomas a Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, became the hero of his order, and filled Britain, and all Europe, with his fame. From an obsequious courtier, he suddenly became a stern, mortified priest, armed with all the haughty sanctity of the times; and by a long course of stubborn distress, and insolent prosperity, he so embittered the life of king Henry, that this prince, in a fit of passion, exclaimed, "have I none that will rid me of this insolent priest?" He was accused of his brethren, "as a public incendiary, the persecutor of his own order, the king's determined enemy, and the destroyer of all good men who came in his way." And certain courtiers, anxious to gratify their master's revenge, stabbed him at the altar of Canterbury cathedral.*

Amidst innumerable encroachments and usurpations, no one received more insulting treatment than king John. Having refused to allow the pope's nomination of Langton to the see of Canterbury, the whole of the kingdom was laid under the papal interdict for upwards of six years; during which period the churches were sealed up; the ceremonies, on which the salvation of men was then supposed to depend, were intermitted; the lover could not complete his wishes by holy matrimony; and the bodies of the dead were not only denied interment in consecrated ground, but were thrown into ditches, or on the highways, to the great annoyance of the living. The king was then excommunicated from holy church; deposed from his throne; and his kingdom given to Philip of France. The pope's legate, having humbled the cowardly monarch, who threw his crown at this proud prelate's feet, retained it in his possession for a short time, and then restored it to the worthless wearer, as the pope's "vassal and tenant," for the payment of a thousand marks a year to his pontifical master!!†

Robert Grosteste, bishop of Lincoln, was a worthy champion of truth and liberty, and unequalled in knowledge, piety and integrity. The popes were now pursuing a scheme for draining the kingdom of its wealth, and securing all its lucrative benefices to Italians. The bishops were charged at one

* Warner, vol. i. p. 380.

† Fox, vol. i. p. 287.

time, to provide for a hundred of these hungry foreigners ; and now Innocent IVth. commanded Grosteste to give the first vacant canonry to a boy, who was nephew to his holiness. But the hardy prelate wrote to the pope, “ that if we except the sins of Lucifer and antichrist, there can be no greater crime than to deprive the souls of men of the spiritual aid of their pastors, by conferring benefices on persons incapable of performing the duties. Those who serve their own carnal desires by means of the milk and wool of the sheep of Christ, and do not minister the pastoral office to the salvation of the flock, are guilty of destroying souls.” This so inflamed the unhallowed passions of his holiness, that he swore by St. Peter and St. Paul, if it were not for the gentleness of his own disposition, he would so confound this doting old man, who had outlived his understanding and his manners, he would make him such an example, such a prodigy of a wretch, that all Christendom should stand amazed at his punishment. For, he added, “ is not the king of England our vassal, nay our slave, to imprison and destroy whom we please ?” One of his cardinals, however, lowered his tone, by intreating him to moderate his resentment ; and assured him, that as to the prelate’s abilities, learning, and piety, there was not his superior in Christendom, nor his equal among themselves. He was nevertheless excommunicated by the pope ; but the venerable prelate despised the censures of the man of sin, and appealed to the just tribunal of God.*

Boniface VIIIth. who closed the thirteenth century, surpassed all his predecessors. He pushed all their oppressive claims with a degree of obstinacy approaching to madness, being insensible to all the mischiefs occasioned by his wild ambition, and resolved to try the patience of a prostrate world.† The legates of holy see exhibited a faithful representation of their master, and abuses and oppressions constantly multiplied. The examples of the proud ecclesiastics corrupted as much as their rapaciousness devoured. Nearly every tongue confessed the flagitious conduct of the clergy, who, armed with all the spiritual terrors, and possessed of the keys of paradise, despised the slaves, who crouched to them

* Fox, vol. i. p. 366.

† Milner, vol. iv. p. 69.

for absolution; and in confidence of their security, they regarded not their enemies, only as persons on whom they might glut their malice with impunity, and plunder without remorse.

The Christian churches bore scarcely any resemblance to those of Jesus Christ. The holy Scriptures were locked up in an unknown tongue. The ignorant and illiterate people were unable to discover or to claim the rights and liberties of Christians. The rules of their conduct were not the sacred precepts of the Gospel, but the decrees of popes, with the innovations and unmeaning fancies of visionary monks; which, instead of promoting the true spirit of Christianity, obscured the power of sober reflection, and drew the human mind from all those researches which tended to detect the deceptions and frauds of these pious impostors, into endless labyrinths of darkness and iniquity.

This was the meridian splendour of papal domination. Unresisting submission was paid to the pontifical decrees; the whole ecclesiastic hosts were drilled to passive obedience; and even monarchs held a precarious sceptre, surrendering their crowns and their kingdoms to the sovereign pleasure of his holiness. The stoutest trembled at the papal anathemas, and the most stubborn yielded to the stern obstinacy of persevering ambition. The pontiff and the clergy exercised absolute dominion over the consciences, as well as over the property of the people; the decrees of the pope, and the traditions of the church, were considered of equal authority with the commands of God: thus there arose a most prodigious monster of ecclesiastical despotism, which swallowed up the civil power, and rode triumphant upon the necks of princes and their people.* This is a rapid summary of the insolence, the usurpation, the rapacity of the pope and his clergy, over the wealth of the nation, the consciences of the people, and the liberties and best interests of the churches of Jesus Christ.

SECTION IV.

The Influence of Wickliffe's Opinions on Popish Domination.

THE preceding section furnishes the reader with a melancholy

* Fox, vol. i. p. 484, 885.

picture of the darkness and oppressions of the middle ages. Through the various successive periods, papal despotism and cruelty were progressively accumulating, until at length, men's understandings and consciences, formed by their Creator for the noblest purposes, were bound, as with fetters of iron, in slavish subjection to the arbitrary pleasure of aggrandizing popes, and their ignorant, worthless, and superstitious priests. The religion of Jesus, in itself simple and consistent, unencumbered with trifling and burdensome traditions, and happily calculated to promote the best interests of men, was so far obliterated or disfigured, that scarcely any traces of its original beauty and excellency could be found; and instead of being employed for the advancement of those glorious purposes for which it was appointed by its Author, it was made the instrument of all kinds of fraud, superstition, debauchery, and oppression.

Under the domination of Rome, the clergy had, by their uncontrollable influence over the people, extended their temporal power to a point unparalleled in the annals of the church. Priests of every description claimed exemption from all civil jurisdiction; and a clergyman guilty of the foulest crimes was not to be tried by the civil magistrate. The Roman pontiffs deposed princes and emperors at pleasure; and having fulminated against them the sentence of deposition and excommunication, authorized their subjects to commit rebellion and regicide. "An heretic," said they, "has no right to his crown; and when he is excommunicated, it is no sin for any one to kill him." On this account, some of the princes of Europe were deposed and murdered; and others, whatever might be their private sentiments, were extremely unwilling to incur the displeasure of his holiness.

The pride and arrogance of the popes arose to an insupportable height. These men, assuming to themselves the lofty and arrogant claim of infallibility, pretended to be God's vicars upon earth, the sovereign judges of truth, the heads of the church, and the unerring guides of all Christians, but were frequently monsters of perfidy, blasphemy, lust, pride, and cruelty—a disgrace to religion and humanity! If such was the *head* of the church, it could not be expected that the other ecclesiastics and inferior clergy would be re-

markable for their morals and piety. They were, indeed, sunk in the dregs of ignorance and debauchery; and the laity, guided by such teachers, were at once the dupes of superstition and wickedness.

By the unparalleled rapacity and scandalous exactions of the sovereign pontiff, this country was nearly drained of its wealth. The disposal of ecclesiastical benefices in England was claimed by the pope, who generally bestowed them upon foreign ecclesiastics; who, by his dispensation, enjoyed the profits without residing in the kingdom; while their benefices were farmed to the English, who served the cures for very small sums. The most important causes of a civil nature, which the ecclesiastical courts contrived to bring within their jurisdiction, were carried to Rome; and the sums of money annually exported out of the kingdom, for these and numerous other purposes, amounted to two thirds more than the produce of the royal treasury.

The commencement of the fourteenth century, was the golden age of popery; and had the accustomed affairs of the nation continued uninterrupted, our Isle would have become one vast monastery, and England a nation of monks. But the greedy, insolent avarice of the court of Rome, and the dominant pride of the priesthood, which was become proverbial, prepared the nation for those auspicious events which afterwards followed. For, when empires have arrived at their height of glory, they become stationary, fall into decrepitude, and rush to ruin. This was an age of portentous agitations, both in church and state: two kings were deposed and murdered; on which a learned churchman remarks, “that the clergy were the *first* to lead this dance of disloyalty, and that, in all state alternations, be they *ever so bad*, the pulpit will be made of the same wood as the council-board. Thus ambitious clergymen abuse the silver trumpets of the sanctuary, and make what was appointed to sound religion, to signify rebellion.”* Whilst, however, the pope strove to profit by this scramble for power, he by untoward events was a considerable loser.

This was the state of the church and the nation, when di-

* Fuller, b. iv. p. 153.

vine Providence raised up that bright luminary of the Christian church, Dr. John Wickliffe. This learned divine was born in 1324, near Richmond in Yorkshire, and has been usually styled "The Morning-star" of the Reformation. He made a noble stand against the encroachment of arbitrary power, and the tyrannical usurpations of the papacy. He exposed, as in the light of the noon-day sun, the innumerable errors, superstitions, and cruelties of the Roman hierarchy, and of every order of its tyrannizing ecclesiastics. He made a prompt and vigorous effort to restore to the minds of men, the possession and exercise of those *rights* which were given them by their Creator, and which are essential to man's rational nature.

The piety and superior penetration of Wickliffe, enabled him to make the most important discoveries. He adopted a more simple and rational method of inquiring after truth, than was usually pursued in those times of spiritual vassallage. He claimed as well the *right* as the *power* of thinking and deciding for himself upon all points in theology; and he took the plain text of *Scripture* into his hand, unencumbered by the corruptions of ancient commentators and scholastic divines; and endeavoured to discover the true and genuine sense of the book of God, disregarding the prevailing and established opinions of men. By this method of investigating divine truth, he attained to that noble freedom of thought, by which his writings were afterwards so eminently distinguished; and which procured him, according to the custom of the times, the title of "the Evangelic Doctor."*

All the circumstances of Wickliffe's life, remarkably illustrated the wisdom of divine Providence, in preparing and bringing into active operation suitable instruments for accomplishing the most important enterprises. Wickliffe's lot was cast in an age when the abuses of the church had become intolerable; and a successful controversy in behalf of the university of Oxford, with the mendicants, or begging friars, first raised him to public notice. This, in the year 1361, procured his election to the mastership of Baliol college; and his subsequent success in defending the king and parliament, by his

* Gilpin's Lives, vol. i. p. 4.

learned and unanswerable writings, against the papal usurpations, proclaimed his fame at court, and through the country. By the active part which he took in supporting the independence of the crown, against the unrighteous pretensions and cruel threatenings of the pope, though he irritated both the clergy and the pontiff, he gained the applause of the king and the parliament, as well as of every disinterested subject of the realm. These intrepid efforts established his reputation in the opinion of all worthy persons, and gave him an opportunity of diffusing the light of truth in all directions, as fast as it beamed on his own mind. He appears to have been led forwards, like his successor, Luther, by a honest mind, and an intrepid spirit; but without knowing to what point he was destined to go, or whither the habit of inquiring into existing abuses, and protesting against them, would ultimately lead him. As his first attempts were levelled against the papal innovations; so his thoughts were afterwards directed to explore all the corruptions of the system; and the more he thought and investigated, the darker did it appear, till at length he received full conviction, that the pope was "the man of sin" foretold by the apostles.

Wickliffe being preferred to the divinity professor's chair at Oxford, was placed in a situation extremely congenial to his wishes, affording him the most favourable opportunity for the public discussion of all subjects connected with morals and divinity. By a long course of investigation, he was thoroughly convinced that the religion of Rome was full of errors and superstitions, and promoted by usurpation, imposition, and cruelty, in direct violation of holy Scripture and the rights of conscience. He was first led to these discoveries from the loose and immoral lives of the monastic clergy; and his views were more powerfully confirmed by his researches into antiquity. To oppose so great a torrent of evils, required the greatest wisdom, courage, and circumspection, which he employed to the utmost of his ability. He failed not to expose in his public lectures, the numerous errors, delusions, and iniquities of the monastic institutions, especially those of their clergy. A regard for religion, he said, was not to be expected from such men. They had nothing in view but the advancement of their own order. In every age, he observed,

they had made it their practice to invent and multiply such new doctrines, as best suited their avaricious minds; and they had nearly set aside Christianity, by binding men to observe their traditions, in preference to the New Testament of Jesus Christ; who, it might be supposed, left nothing out of his scheme that was useful.

This champion for the truth, next made a bold and vigorous attack upon the usurpations and oppressions of the court of Rome, which was ever a favourite topic with him, and on which he openly declared his sentiments without reserve. The pope himself was frequently the subject of his animadversion; and he openly exposed his pretended infallibility, his usurpation, pride, avarice, and ecclesiastical despotism. He even ventured to call him *Antichrist*. He declaimed against the pride, and pomp, and luxury of bishops; and asked the people, when they saw their right reverend fathers, attended by fourscore horsemen in silver trappings, whether they perceived any resemblance between such splendour, and the simplicity of *primitive* bishops? He opened his mind on these subjects with a degree of freedom, and strength of argument, far superior to the courage and learning of those times. Wickliffe, at the same time, translated the Bible out of Latin into English, with a long preface, in which he pointedly reflected on the prevailing corruptions of the clergy; condemned the worship of saints and images; denied the corporeal presence of Christ in the sacrament; and exhorted all people to the study of the holy Scriptures. His bible, with the preface, was well received; and, as it justly exposed innumerable errors and abuses, so it proved the happy means of diffusing better principles through every part of the kingdom.*

Wickliffe's translation excited the fiercest animosity in the minds of dignified ecclesiastics; because, as the Scriptures themselves were, on many accounts, particularly displeasing to them, so it was impossible that they could view with complacency their translation and circulation, even though they were confined to the schools of learning, and to the libraries of such of the nobility as could afford to possess the high and costly luxury of *manuscript libraries*. These translations re-

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 23.

presented the founder of Christianity, as a lover of peace, as a person mean in his worldly circumstances, and altogether opposed by his doctrine and example to outward state and grandeur. They gave no sanction to *wars*, *crusades*, and such enterprises in the cause of Christ, nor to the pomp, wealth, pride, and pageantry, of the clerical order. They afforded no sanction to many of the doctrines of the church of Rome. Five out of seven of the sacraments of that church were unknown to the sacred volume; and equally unauthorized by it, was the papal hierarchy itself, and nearly all its institutions. As the vast assumption and pre-eminence of the pope had no foundation in the holy Scriptures; so the various orders and dignities, as cardinals, archbishops, deans, archdeacons, vicars, priests, and many others, had absolutely no warrant from the book of God. The Reformer, in his other writings, most solemnly protested against the multiplied innovations, as false, superstitious, antichristian; and not unfrequently he expressed himself upon these topics, with holy and elevated indignation.

These courageous exertions could not fail to awaken the violent clamour of the bishops and other dignitaries; and Simon Islip, archbishop of Canterbury, who took the lead, and set the example to his brethren, was determined to proceed against him with the utmost rigour. The church had, however, slept so long in its errors and superstitions, that it was unprepared for so bold an attack. The zealous ecclesiastics searched records, examined precedents, and at length, with some difficulty, Wickliffe was deprived and silenced.* It was no doubt a favourable circumstance for him, that there was not in England, at this time, any law in force for burning heretics.

Whilst the patrons of ignorance and intolerance sought to crush the famous Reformer, together with the just sentiments he propagated; and the Roman pontiff published his thundering bulls, commanding him to be seized and punished for his damnable heresies; he was protected, and his cause espoused, by some of the first persons in the nation, particularly the famous John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, and

* Fox, vol. i. p. 485, 486.

Lord Piercy. The duke had imbibed many of Wickliffe's sentiments concerning the usurpation and tyranny of the pope, but was, at the same time, a man of violent passions. He was a determined enemy to the exorbitant power of the clergy, which excited their indignation against him. As they hated the duke, and trembled at his principles, some of the leading ecclesiastics are said to have used very base means to blacken his character. This kind of usage from the clergy did not give him any more favourable opinion of their character, but confirmed his abhorrence of their pride and intolerance; and he retorted upon them, by using all the methods in his power to make them as much despised by others as they were by himself. Wickliffe's exposure and attack of the Romish church, gave the duke great pleasure, who waited to see its consequences with much anxious attention; and when he found that the zealous advocate of liberty was in danger, he interposed his power; rescued him out of the hands of his enemies; conveyed him up to court; took him into his confidence; and treated him with every possible kindness. Thus was the celebrated Reformer not only rescued from the malice and outrage of those in holy orders, but introduced into more public life, which afforded him a more gratifying opportunity of signalizing himself in the cause of truth and liberty.

Wickliffe was summoned to appear before the archbishop of Canterbury, and the rest of the bishops at Lambeth. The intrepid Reformer obeyed the summons; when "all expected he would have been devoured, as in a den of lions." But, on the day of examination, a gentleman courtier waited on these right reverend fathers, "commanding them not to proceed to any definitive sentence against John Wickliffe." Never, perhaps, were the lord-bishops before served with such a prohibition. It was supposed that the messenger durst not have delivered his mandamus, had he not been backed by the prince who employed him. "The bishops being struck with a panic, dropped the proceeding;" and so Wickliffe escaped the heavy punishment, which no doubt would have been inflicted upon him.*

* Fuller, b. iv. p. 137.

The complaints of existing abuses now became general. The high offices of state had for a long time been wholly occupied by ecclesiastical dignitaries, and the government of the kingdom wholly in their hands; therefore the temporal lords and commons in parliament, beholding this extreme inconvenience, petitioned the king, "that none but laymen might be capable of the offices of chancellor, treasurer, keeper of the privy seal, barons of the exchequer, and other great places of the civil list." His majesty signified, in reply to this petition, "that he would ordain upon this point, as it should seem best to him by the advice of his good council:" accordingly, to give them satisfaction, and make a trial of the expedient, the bishops were removed from several of the principal civil offices.*

The nation began now to feel its own interest, and to seek release from ecclesiastical bondage. The diffusion of Wickliffe's opinions contributed, more than any other event, to make this impression on all ranks of society. The subject was vigorously espoused by the ruling powers. Edward III. now king of England, had for some time withdrawn the tribute, which his predecessors, from the time of king John, had paid to the pope. The pontiff menaced in his usual despotic tone; but he had a prince to deal with of too high a spirit to be intimidated by his threatening bulls. Edward called a parliament; laid the affair before them; and desired their advice. The parliament, without much debate, resolved, that king John had acted illegally, and had surrendered the rights of the nation. They, at the same time, advised the king by no means to submit to the pontifical usurpation; and promised to afford him their utmost assistance, if the affair should require it.†

England groaned under the intolerable oppressions of the court of Rome, especially that of draining the wealth of the nation. Not only was religion decayed and lost in the innumerable human impositions; but, that which was considered as the most vexatious, a body of insolent tithe-gatherers were set over the people, who had to make their own fortunes out of the surplus of their exactions for the holy see. These

* Warner, vol. i. p. 506.

† Echard, p. 156.

hardships, notwithstanding the blind obedience paid to his holiness, created great uneasiness. The nation saw itself wronged; and parliamentary petitions, in strong language, were presented to the Romish conclave; but to very little purpose: the pope refusing to hear any motion which affected his power, or his revenue.

The duke of Lancaster had a spirit answerable to his birth, and preserved the forms of royalty as much as any monarch of his time; therefore, though the nation had complained in vain for upwards of thirty years, he was determined if possible to obtain redress. And, in the first place, to open the eyes of the people in the most effectual manner, he obliged the bishops to send in lists of the number and value of such preferments, as were in the hands of foreigners. From these lists it appeared what immense sums were in this way conveyed annually out of the kingdom. He next sent an embassy to the pope, to treat of the liberties of the church of England; at the head of which were the bishop of Bangor and Dr. Wickliffe. The agents of both parties met at Bruges; and though after a considerable time a kind of treaty was made, it was never observed. Wickliffe, however, made the journey of considerable service to himself. With great care he embraced every opportunity afforded him of sifting the real designs of the court of Rome, not only in this affair, but in all its negociations. He minutely examined the ends it had in view, and the means it employed: and by frequent intercourse with the Romish ambassadors upon these subjects, he penetrated so far into the constitution and policy of that corrupt court, that he became more convinced than ever of its avarice, ambition, encroachment, and intolerance. Though he had long been opposed to its doctrines and ministry, he had never till now thought so ill of its designs.*

Thus instructed, on his return home, he did not fail to refute the policy, and expose the aggrandizement of antichrist. Among the principles which he propagated and defended, and for which he was accused by the prelates, we have selected the following specimen as given by his enemies:—He denied the pope's supremacy, and was opposed to any person

* Gilpin, vol. i. p. 19.

assuming the arrogant title of head of the church ; declaring, “ That it was blasphemy to call any one head of the church, save Christ alone.” He condemned the Romish infallibility as the shocking mark of antichrist ; affirming, “ That the doctrine of the infallibility of the church of Rome, in matters of faith, was the greatest blasphemy of antichrist.” He condemned episcopacy as the mere creature of princes, and considered the officers of the primitive church, as the only officers belonging to the church of Christ, and as unalterable by any human power ; declaring, “ That in the times of the apostles there were only two orders, namely, priests and deacons ; that a bishop did not differ from a priest ; that priests and deacons might preach without license ; and that priests of bad life, cease any longer to be priests.” He defended the maintenance of ministers by voluntary contribution, and opposed the system of tithes settled on the people by law ; saying, “ That tithes are pure alms, and that pastors ought not to exact them by ecclesiastical censures.” He rejected all human authority and interference in things sacred, and rested the whole of religion on the word of God ; declaring, “ That he rejected the authority of general councils ; and that wise men will leave that as impertinent, which is not plainly expressed in Scripture.” He was opposed to the use of prescribed forms of prayer, but especially the *imposition* of them, as prejudicial to the rights of Christians ; and said, “ That to bind men to set and prescript forms of prayers, *derogates from that liberty which God hath given them.*”*

Wickliffe held many other sentiments ; but in numerous instances his meaning seems to have been distorted, by the prejudice and malice of the papists. They even accused him of the opinion, “ that God ought to obey the devil.” This single fact shows to what an awful length calumny and credulity may go, when the minds of men are heated by passion and prejudice. “ Such things,” says Wickliffe, “ do they invent of catholic men that they may blacken their reputation, as if they held this impious opinion, that God is a devil, or any other open heretical tenet ; and they are prepared by false and slanderous witnesses to fix such heresies on good men as if they had invented them.”†

* Fuller, b. iv. p. 131—133.

† Milner, vol. iv. p. 208. Appen. p. 29.

Though it could hardly be expected that all our Reformer's sentiments were unexceptionable ; yet he held many opinions equally important as those already enumerated. He maintained, " That the Gospel was a sufficient rule of itself, without any human additions, to govern the life of any Christian : —That all other rules add no more perfection to the Gospel, than the white colour doth to the wall :—That neither the pope, nor any other prelate, ought to have prisons wherein to punish transgressors." He was a zealous advocate for the office and authority of the civil magistrate in *all civil* matters, as that which is ordained of God. He maintained that Jesus Christ was the only head of the church ; and denied all human power and authority in religious concerns, as gross usurpation, and a direct violation of these portions of Scripture : " Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but examples of the flock. The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great, exercise authority upon them ; but it shall not be so among you : but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister ; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant : even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

As to the lofty claims of the papacy, he said, it was a scandal to the Christian church, that any of its members should set up his own authority against the authority of Jesus Christ. The best argument for defending the authority of the church, was, in his opinion, the necessity of that authority to support the doctrine of the pope ; and it was this that made it worth defending at the expense of *truth*. On this subject, he said, the pope would not submit his authority to the same trial as Jesus Christ, who said : " If I do not the works of my Father which is in heaven, believe me not." But the pope's authority must be acknowledged, though he do the works of the devil. Thus, says he, Christians are in greater thralldom than were the Jews under the old law ; and that liberty, by which Christ hath made us free, is by the wickedness of designing men changed into the most absolute spiritual bondage. " The days," he adds, " I hope will come, when men will be wise enough to shake from off their necks, the dominion of these human ordinances ; and disdain submission to *any ecclesiasti-*

cal injunctions, except those which are *plainly authorized by the word of God.*"*

These were stigmatized Wickliffe's dangerous errors, and damnable heresies, for which the pope and his colleagues threatened him with eternal damnation; but, surely, such generous and dignified sentiments, while they were almost miraculous in that dark age, would not appear unseemly among the most famous prelates and divines in modern times. Who can seriously review the thick darkness from which this sacred genius emerged, and not acknowledge with mingled astonishment and admiration, the clearness, justness, and comprehension of his views? Who can wonder that principles, which so forcibly appealed to scripture and common sense, and were so well calculated to liberate mankind from the galling fetters of priestly despotism under which they groaned, should find a numerous host of admirers? But we naturally ask, how the daring promulgator of such offensive truths could escape the deadly fangs of the great red dragon? After many dangers and deliverances, the intrepid Reformer wrote a letter to the pontiff himself, boldly and unequivocally declaring his sentiments in these words:

"I rejoice to open and declare to every man, especially to the bishop of Rome, the faith which I hold. For, as I suppose it to be sound and true, he will confirm my faith; or, if it be erroneous, he will amend it. The Gospel of Christ is the whole body of God's law. I hold the bishop of Rome, as he is the vicar of Christ, to be bound most of all other men to that law of the Gospel. The greatness amongst Christ's disciples did not consist in worldly honours or dignity, but in the near and exact following of Christ in his life and manners: whereupon I gather out of the law of the Lord, that Christ in the time of his pilgrimage here, was a most poor man, casting off all worldly rule and honour.

"I also fully gather, that no faithful man ought to follow, either the pope himself, or any holy man, but in such points as he hath followed the Lord Jesus Christ. For Peter and the sons of Zebedee, by desiring worldly honour, contrary to following the steps of Christ, did offend; and, therefore, in

* Fox, vol. i. p. 491, 510.—Brit. Biog. vol. i. p. 43—46.

those errors they are not to be imitated. I gather that the pope ought to leave all temporal dominion and rule to the secular power, and to move and exhort the whole of his clergy effectually thereto : for so did Christ, and especially his apostles. Wherefore, if I have erred in any of these points, I will most humbly submit myself to correction, even by death, if necessity require ; and if I could labour according to my desire in my own person, I would surely present myself before the bishop of Rome : but the Lord hath otherwise visited me, and hath taught me to obey *God* rather than *men*.”*

In the foregoing heretical opinions, as well as in this bold address to his holiness, Wickliffe advocates the cause of religious freedom, and rests the whole on its only secure foundation. He obviously maintains, that the *Word of God* is the unimpeachable, all-sufficient, and only rule in all matters of religion, to the exclusion of all compulsory interference on the part of man ; and that popes and prelates ought to renounce their secular power and authority, and, in all their concerns, to submit themselves to the authority of Jesus Christ and his apostles. These are the fundamental principles of Christianity, on which the unalienable rights of conscience are founded.

It may be easily conceived how these doctrines would be received at Rome, and what impressions they would make on the mind of his holiness. Sentiments were never published to the world more hostile to the usurpations, impositions, and cruelties of the papal see ; or more galling and offensive to the sovereign impostor. Articles of accusation against Wickliffe were, therefore, immediately despatched to Rome, when the pope engaged in the prosecution with the utmost readiness and alacrity. He sent on this occasion no less than five thundering bulls to England. The zeal of the holy father was, no doubt, greatly augmented by the unfavourable tendency of Wickliffe's tenets, upon the revenues of the church. With these bulls the pope sent to the bishops copies of the heretical articles, requiring them to examine whether the heretic really held those doctrines ; and, if he did, immediately to cast him into prison ; or, if they failed in this, to cite him personally

* Fox, vol. i. p. 508.

to make his appearance within three months at Rome, where he would assuredly be rewarded according to his crimes. He also enjoined the bishops to represent to king Richard II. and his council, that his errors were equally dangerous to the state, as they were to the ecclesiastical establishment.*

The pope had very little doubt of the success of his bulls, as the papal power had not been accustomed to receive contradiction. However despotic and unreasonable its demands, the greatest monarchs had usually obeyed them in the most implicit and submissive manner. But a new scene was now opening to view, and an improved tone of feeling began to appear in the nation, to which the preaching of Wickliffe had greatly contributed. The imperious pontiff must have been very sensibly mortified at the neglect with which he was treated. The university of Oxford deliberated whether it should receive his bull, and it seems to have refused. The regency were so far from being disposed to show him reverence, that they united at this juncture, with the parliament, in giving a very public and signal instance of their esteem for, and confidence in, Dr. Wickliffe; as if they had designed to make their contempt of the pope as notorious as possible. The French, on the death of king Edward, resolved to take the advantage of the minority of Richard; accordingly Charles the Fifth had soon five armies in the field, and a strong fleet at sea, which he sent out with orders to infest the coast of England. As the country was now very far from being in a posture of defence, all the money that could be raised was indispensably necessary, to enable the regency to oppose these formidable assaults. The parliament having entered upon its deliberations on ways and means, it was debated in the house, whether the money collected in England for the use of the pope, might not, in such case of emergency, be employed for the service of the nation; and, as they all agreed upon the expediency of the measure, the only point to be settled was its legality. After much deliberation it was at length agreed, both by the regency and the parliament, to put the question to Dr. Wickliffe; who, upon a question of this nature, was certainly the most excellent casuist they could have consulted. He readily gave them his opinion, with the

* Gilpin, vol. i. p. 26.

substantial reasons on which it was founded, that they might very conscientiously make this freedom with the pope's money.* There was, indeed, the utmost necessity for taking some prompt measures, as the French had already invaded the country, and committed numerous depredations in various parts of the kingdom.

Notwithstanding the honour and esteem which Wickliffe received from the regency and parliament, and the disrespect with which the university and the king treated the authority of his holiness, the bishops made ample amends by their abundant zeal and assiduity to support the papal see. Courtenay, bishop of London, in particular, not only complied with his most holy mandate, but entered into all the spirit of it. The reformer was convened before a synod in St. Paul's cathedral; but being accompanied by the duke of Lancaster, lord Piercy, and other powerful supporters, Wickliffe was a mere spectator of the rude quarrel between the prelates and the nobles, which ended in a riot, and left him to depart unhurt and uncensured.† The bishop of London was stopped in his career at the very commencement of his proceedings against the Reformer, by receiving a peremptory order from the duke of Lancaster, not to imprison Wickliffe. The prince told him, that to imprison a man for holding an *opinion*, could not be justified by the laws of England; therefore, he took the liberty of informing him, that, if he proceeded to such extremity, he must take the consequences. The right reverend prelate, alarmed at this menace, immediately relinquished the design, not daring to do more than cite Wickliffe before a provincial synod at Lambeth, and send him a copy of the articles objected against him, desiring an explanation.

Courtenay being afterwards preferred to the see of Canterbury, was resolved to crush Wickliffe and his opinions; he therefore cited the Reformer to appear before him in the monastery of Grey Friars. But, being a member of the university, and holding an office there, he was exempt from his lordship's episcopal jurisdiction, and he refused to appear. The university itself was in his favour, and the determination of the majority was to support their member. Though his grace

* Fox, vol. i. p. 510.

† Fuller, b. iv. p. 135.

made himself as content as he could under this mortifying disappointment, and as he could not proceed against the person of Wickliffe, he resolved to suppress his doctrines; and accordingly when the court assembled on a certain day appointed, a large collection of articles was produced. At the instant that the court was entering upon its deliberations, the monastery was shaken by a violent earthquake. The affrighted bishops threw down their papers, and exclaimed, that their proceedings were displeasing to God; and hastily resolved to relinquish the suit. The archbishop alone continued unmoved. He chid the superstitious fears of his brethren, and told them, that if the earthquake portended any thing, it was the downfall of heresy: that as noxious vapours are lodged in the bowels of the earth, and are expelled by these violent concussions; so by their strenuous endeavours, the nation should be purified from the pestilence of heresy, which had infected every part of the kingdom. His speech, after some reflection, dispelled their fears. Wickliffe afterwards often spoke of this incident, and usually called this assembly, "The council of the Herydene," the old English word for earthquake.*

This reverend assembly having published its resolutions and proceedings to the world, Dr. Wickliffe ventured to write a reply; in which he showed how much his adversaries had misrepresented him; and he defended his tenets with such a spirit of truth and freedom, that he gained many over to his party. This was called his *audacity*, at which the archbishop was exceedingly offended, and upon which he preferred a bill in parliament to enable sheriffs, on the information of bishops, to proceed to the imprisonment of all the preachers of heresy. The bill passed the lords, but was thrown out by the commons, who were so far illumined by the new doctrine, that they were by no means disposed to increase the power of the clergy. The archbishop, thus galled and mortified by the representative body, made application to king Richard for his royal license to accomplish the same object, which he imagined would equally serve his purpose as an act of parliament. Richard, finding this particularly gratifying to his prerogative, thought proper to comply with the primate's request, and

* Gilpin, vol. i. p. 44.

immediately appointed letters patent to be issued, granting his grace the full powers he desired, as comprised in the following words :

“ Whereupon the said archbishop hath made his supplication to us, that both for coercion and due castigation of such as shall henceforth of an obstinate mind, preach or maintain the foresaid conclusions, we would put to the arm and helping hand of our kingly power. We, therefore, moved by the zeal of the catholic faith, whereof we are and will be defenders, and unwilling that any such heresies or errors should spring up within our dominions, give and grant special license and authority, by the tenor of these presents, to the foresaid archbishop, and to his *suffragans*, to arrest and imprison, either in their own persons or any other, all and every such person or persons as shall either privily or openly preach and maintain the foresaid conclusions ; and the same persons so imprisoned to be there detained at *their pleasures*, till such time as they shall repent and amend such heretical pravities.”*

The grant of these unlimited powers to an ecclesiastical officer, could not be very agreeable to the body of the people ; therefore, when the parliament assembled soon after, heavy complaints were sent from every part of the country to their representatives, expressing in strong language how much the people thought themselves aggrieved by this stretch of the prerogative. This, in those dark and oppressive times, was a noble stand for the right of private judgment, against the encroachments of arbitrary power. The people, capable of thinking and deciding for themselves, could not feel easy when placed wholly at the control and disposal of proud, avaricious, and merciless ecclesiastics. Thus began to dawn upon the island of Britain, the morning of Christian liberty, and the exercise of the rights of human nature.

The representative body, to whom the people presented their complaints, were not wholly deaf to the cries and groans of the nation. The members of the lower house showed their interest in this business ; and, with the character of Englishmen, they manifested their abhorrence of that spiritual vassalage, into which his grace of Canterbury endeavoured to bring

* Fox, vol. i. p. 503.

all the people of the land. "These new powers," said they, "are dangerous encroachments. If the liberties of the people are thus put into the hands of the clergy, the nation will become subject to a new kind of despotism. *Heresy*," they added, "is an unlimited word, and may bear as wide a construction as a bishop shall choose to give it : nor can it be doubted, that it will often be made to signify whatever the pride or avarice of the clergy may think expedient." Filled with these enlarged and honourable sentiments, the commons petitioned the king against the license which he had granted ; and Richard, a prince of no great excellence, but agreeable to the instability of his character, listened to their supplication, and revoked that license to oblige the laity, which he had before granted to please the clergy. Thus was the zeal of the archbishop again baffled, and his deep-laid projects entirely blasted ; while one important branch of the legislature, by the independence of its principles, and the worthiness of its energies, rescued the nation from the worst kind of slavery.

A very considerable schism having taken place in the catholic church, Wickliffe considered it as involving a new argument against the infallibility and domination of Rome. Certain dissensions having arisen between pope Urban VI. and his cardinals, the latter thought proper to dispute the validity of Urban's election, and to elect a new pope whom they styled Clement VII. This great schism divided all Europe, each particular state, from political interest, and not as matter of right, declaring for one or other of the two popes. France, whose interest it was, declared in favour of Clement ; and, on the contrary, England thought it more advantageous to espouse the cause of Urban. By the different powers taking different sides in this ecclesiastical quarrel, the nations of Europe were deluged with blood, only to determine which of these two infallible gentlemen had the right to St. Peter's chair ! Urban, to rouse the nations in his favour, published a bull, in which he deposed and excommunicated the opposite party and all his adherents, as the sons of perdition, and called upon all, who had any regard for religion, to exert themselves at this time in its cause ; and take up arms against Clement and his adherents, in defence of the holy see. The times, he said, required violent measures ; and for the encouragement of the faithful, he

promised them pardons and indulgences, which were always granted to those who lost their lives in these holy wars !

Wickliffe could not behold these events with the eye of an unconcerned spectator. He very justly considered this dreadful schism as a decisive argument against the lofty claims of the papacy ; and, even in the decline of years, took up his pen once more, and openly exposed the spiritual fraud and usurpation of the two popes, showing how little credit was due to either of the contending parties. A bloody and destructive war in which the name of religion was so vilely prostituted, roused Wickliffe's indignation ; and he expostulated with the pope in very strong language, boldly asking him, " How he durst make the token of Christ on the cross, which is a token of peace, mercy, and charity, a banner to lead on to slay Christian men, for the love of two false priests ; and to oppress Christendom worse than Christ and his apostles were oppressed by the Jews ? When," he adds, " will the proud priest of Rome grant indulgences to mankind to live in peace and charity, as he now does to fight and slay one another ?"* This piece was eagerly read by persons of all ranks, and greatly contributed to open the eyes of the people.

Wickliffe had the intrepidity to present to the parliament a bold philippic against the tyranny of the church of Rome, and to expose the scandalous usurpations of the holy see. He wisely prepared the way for his translation of the Bible, on which he bestowed immense labour, by a book on the truth of the Scriptures, entitled, " The Path to perfect Knowledge," in which he urges all Christians, old and young, to study the Scriptures diligently, particularly the New Testament, which, he says, " is full of authority, and gives understanding to the simple, especially in all points needful to salvation." He boldly asserts, that as Elijah had the truth of God against king Ahab and eight hundred and fifty priests of Baal, so a few poor men, in comparison of learned clerks, may have the truth now in opposition to all the prelates and clergy. If a man, says he, abstain from swearing, and out of charity reprove sin, he is branded and persecuted as a heretic and a Lollard ; but if any one determine to defend himself against the persecution of the

* Gilpin, vol. i. p. 50.

prelates, he has only to swear boldly by Christ's bones, nails and limbs, and be proud, lecherous, and profane.

Although the daring Reformer had numerous friends at Oxford, who bore a principal sway in the university, he was obliged, through continued molestations from the archbishop, at length to quit the place of his public usefulness, where his name had long been highly revered and honoured. The unwearied persecution from the bigoted primate so far prevailed, that he was constrained to retreat to his pastoral charge at Lutterworth ; where he afterwards died in peace on his own bed, in the year of our Lord 1384. By the command of the pope and the council of Constance, after the expiration of forty-one years, his bones were dug up, committed to the flames, and the ashes cast into the adjoining brook.*

Thus ended the labours and life of Dr. John Wickliffe ; who, on account of his superior penetration, the justness of his sentiments, and the undaunted spirit with which he engaged in the great cause of religious liberty, was one of the most distinguished ornaments of his country, and his memory is worthy of being revered and honoured by all men of liberal principles to the end of the world. Wickliffe was a man of exemplary piety, and unblemished morals. Notwithstanding the number and vigilance of his enemies, they have never presumed to tax him with immoral practice. Though in his private deportment he appears to have been uniformly respectable ; yet his public character it is which principally entitles him to our attention and regard. We hesitate not to admire him, says his biographer, as one of the greatest ornaments of his country ; and as one of those prodigies whom providence raises up, and directs as its instruments to enlighten mankind. His amazing penetration ; his rational manner of thinking ; and the noble freedom of his spirit, are equally the objects of our admiration. Wickliffe was in religion, what Bacon was afterwards in science ; the great detector of those arts and glosses, by which the barbarism of ages had obscured the mind of man. To this intuitive genius, Christendom was unquestionably more indebted than to any name in the list of reformers. He explored the regions of darkness, and let in not a feeble and

* Fox, vol. i. p. 490—529.—Brit. Biog. vol. i. p. 30—41.

glimmering ray; but such an effulgence of light, as could never be obscured. He not only loosened prejudices, but advanced such clear incontestible truths, as having once obtained kept their ground, and proved an unspeakable blessing to future generations.*

This great Reformer discovered that ingenuousness of spirit and of principle, which we seldom find recorded on the page of history, as appears from the following solemn declaration by Wickliffe's own pen:—"Let God be my witness, that I principally intend the honour of God, and the good of the Church, from a spirit of veneration for the divine word, and of obedience to the law of Christ: but if, with that intention, a sinister view of vain glory, of secular gain, or of vindictive malice, hath crept in unknown to myself, I sincerely grieve on the account, and, by the grace of God, will guard against it."† As the sun in a spring morning, rising above the eastern horizon, is often obscured by mist and clouds, but gaining strength dispels the gloomy vapours, and gives light, life and joy to mankind—so Wickliffe rose in our western world to check the terrific career of cruel bigotry, to stem the tide of priestly intolerance, to emancipate the human mind from spiritual slavery, and to prove to the world, that literature, philanthropy, and liberality of sentiment, constitute essential characteristics of all true Christians. Every impartial historian will, therefore, erect a monument of tribute and respect to the memory of this celebrated Reformer.

Wickliffe's death, and the ridiculous farce of burning his bones and scattering his ashes, was insufficient to a complete extirpation of heresy. His opinions had so universally diffused through the nation, that a writer of those times says: "If you met two persons on the road, you might be sure that one of them was a follower of Wickliffe." Being deeply conscious of the truth and importance of their doctrines, they discovered great zeal and assiduity in the propagation of them; and the Lord abundantly blessed their labours. Almost innumerable converts were made, especially among "persons of rank and learning."‡ Wickliffe's numerous writings, particularly his

* Gilpin, vol. i. p. 52.

† Milner, vol. iv. p. 136.

‡ Warner, vol. i. p. 527.

translations of the Scriptures, were dispersed into every corner of the land, and through every part of Christendom. They were esteemed by multitudes of great and learned men, at home and abroad, as more precious than jewels ; and having fallen into the hands of persons who were disposed to favour a deliverance from the usurpation and tyranny of Rome, almost innumerable copies were transcribed, and dispersed through all nations.

Wickliffe unanswerably proved that the Book of God ought to be in the hands and language of the people, saying ;—“ Scripture is the faith of the Church, and the more it is known in an orthodox sense, the better ; therefore as secular men ought to know the faith, the divine word is to be taught them in whatever language is best known to them. The truth of the faith is clearer and more exact in the Scripture, than the priests know how to express it ; and, if one may say so, there are many prelates who are ignorant of Scripture, and others who conceal things contained therein. It seems useful, therefore, that the faithful should themselves search and discover the sense of the faith, by having the Scriptures in a language which they know and understand. Christ and his apostles converted men by making known to them the Scriptures in that language which was familiar to them. Why then ought not the modern disciples of Christ to collect fragments from the loaf ; and, as they did, clearly open the Scriptures to the people that they may know them ? The apostle teaches, that we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, and be answerable for all the goods entrusted to us ; it is necessary, therefore, that the faithful should know these goods, and the use of them, that they may give a proper answer. The answer by a prelate or an attorney will not *then* avail, but *every one must answer in his own person*.*

Anne, consort of king Richard, seems to have been a person of extensive knowledge and great piety ; who, dying in the year 1394, had in her possession the Gospels in English, with four learned commentators upon them. At her funeral, archbishop Arundel, in his sermon, adverted to this circumstance, and, as she was born an alien, expressed much surprise at it.

* Milner, vol. iv. Appen. p. 34.

The prelate added, that she had sent to him, for his inspection and judgment, her four English translations of the Gospel, and that he had found them true and faithful. He confessed that it appeared to him a marvellous instance of godliness, that so great a lady would humbly condescend to study such excellent books: and he completed his encomium by declaring, that he never knew a woman of such extraordinary piety.*

This interesting relation may probably induce the reader to conjecture that Arundel himself was a follower of Wickliffe. But he will be both surprised and mortified to find, that shortly after the death of good queen Anne, this same prelate, to the utmost of his power, urged the king to harass and persecute all persons who should dare to read and study the Gospels of Jesus Christ in their native language.†

In Bohemia and other countries, Wickliffe's translations were received and read with great avidity, and they produced the best impressions on the minds of the people. The unhallowed assumption, and multiplied errors of popery were, by this means, exhibited to the view of learned men and the common people, by the most substantial evidence, and an undisguised narration of facts. All who read Wickliffe's productions were convinced of the ridiculous claims and pretensions of Rome, as well as the scandalous proceedings by which they were supported; and were constrained to admire the liberal, humane, and pious principles of the reforming party. While, however, these were the happy effects of so wide a circulation of his writings, other and opposite effects were unintentionally produced by the same means. As might naturally be expected, the enemies of light and liberty were awakened from their long slumber, and the wrath and indignation of the imperious pontiff was aroused to crush the growing evil in the bud. Wickliffe's doctrine and writings were so violently opposed by the pope and his cardinals, that they received in the council of Constance, the following sentence of condemnation:

“In these our days the old and unclean enemy hath raised up new strifes and contentions, whose prince and captain in time past was John Wickliffe, a false Christian; who, during his life-time, taught and sowed very obstinately many articles

* Fox, vol. i. p. 578.

† Ibid.

contrary to the Christian religion and the catholic faith. The same John Wickliffe wrote certain books, which he called a Dialogue and a Trialogue, besides many other treatises and works, in which are many damnable and execrable errors; which books, for the publication and advancement of his perverse doctrine, he set forth openly for *every man to read*. Whereby, besides many offences, great hurt and damage of soul hath ensued in divers regions and countries, but especially in the kingdom of England and Bohemia; which articles the masters and doctors of the universities of Oxford and Prague, defending the truth and verity of God according to the order of schools, within a while after did reprove and condemn.

“Wherefore, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, this sacred synod, ratifying and approving the sentence of the archbishops and council of Rome, do by this their decree and ordinance perpetually and for evermore reprove and condemn the said opinions and every one of them; his books as entitled above and all others his books, volumes, treatises and works, by what name soever they are called. Also we forbid the reading, learning, exposition or alleging of any of the said books to all faithful Christians, except so far as shall tend to the reproof of the same; forbidding all and singular catholic persons, under the pain of curse, that from henceforth they will not be so hardy openly to preach, teach or hold, or by any means to allege the said opinions, or any of them, except to the reproof of them; commanding all those books, volumes, treatises and works aforesaid, to be openly burned, as it was decreed in the synod at Rome. For the execution whereof, duly to be observed, the said synod doth straitly charge and command the ordinaries of the place diligently to attend and look to this matter, according as it appertaineth to every man’s duty by the canonical laws and ordinances.”*

This curious document displays, without disguise, the true spirit, and principles, and practice of popery! Whatever might be the views of “the masters and doctors of the two universities,” as here affirmed, they came forwards at this juncture in the most open and public defence of the new tenets. The university of Oxford, after mature examination, and greatly

* Fox, vol. i. p. 512.

to its honour, published the following manifesto, upwards of twenty years after Wickliffe's death:

“Unto all and singular the children of our holy mother the church, to whom this present letter shall come; the vicechancellor of the university of Oxford, with the whole congregation of masters, with perpetual health in the Lord. For as much as it is not commonly seen, that the acts and monuments of valiant men, nor the praise and merits of good men, should be passed over and hidden in perpetual silence; but that true report and fame should continually spread abroad the same in strange and far distant places, both for the witness of them, and the example of others. For, as the provident discretion of man's nature, being recompensed with cruelty, hath devised and ordained this buckler and defence against such as blaspheme and slander other men's doings, that whensoever witness by word of mouth cannot be obtained, the pen may supply the want of it.

“Hereupon, that the special good-will and care which we bear unto John Wickliffe, some time child of this our university, and professor of divinity, moving and stirring our minds, as his manners and conditions required no less, with one mind, voice and testimony, we do witness all his conditions and doings throughout his whole life, to have been most sincere and commendable; whose honest manners and conditions, profoundness of learning, and most honoured renown and fame, we desire the more earnestly to be notified and known to all the faithful; for we understand that the maturity and ripeness of his conversation, his diligent labours and travails, do tend to the *praise of God*, the *help* and *safeguard of others*, and the *profit of the church*.

“Wherefore we signify unto you by these presents, that his conversation, even from his youth, to the time of his death, was so praise-worthy and honest, that never at any time was there any note or spot of suspicion noised of him. But in his answering, reading, preaching, and determining, he behaved himself laudably, and as a stout and valiant champion of the faith; vanquishing by the force of the *Scriptures*, all who, by their wilful beggary, blasphemed and slandered Christ's religion. Neither was this doctor convicted of any heresy. God forbid, that our prelates

should have condemned a man of such honesty, for an heretic ; who, amongst all the rest of the university, had written in logic, philosophy, divinity, morality, and the speculative arts, without an equal ! The knowledge of which things we desire to testify and deliver forth, to the intent that the fame and renown of this said doctor may be the more evident, and had in reputation amongst those into whose hands these letters testimonial shall come.”*

The university of Prague, with the celebrated John Huss at its head, ventured also, at the same time, to make the most open and determined protestation, in favour of the new doctrine ; and, with numerous other particulars, they adopted the following decree, in favour of Wickliffe’s excellent sentiments :—“ The university of Prague hath concluded and determined, that they will not receive the condemnation of the five-and-forty articles, made by the doctors in their council-house, as just and true ; except they who condemned them will prove their condemnation by probable reasons, and the holy Scriptures.”†

These prompt and decisive measures adopted by the two famous universities, demonstrate to posterity how widely Wickliffe’s liberal principles had diffused, and how highly they were revered and esteemed among the most learned persons in Europe. It is exceedingly probable, that, by the uncontrollable domination of the papacy, these learned and excellent defences were overruled and annulled. So that in exact conformity to the foregoing supercilious denunciation, the bigoted patrons of ignorance and superstition adopted the most prompt measures for the suppression of Wickliffe’s opinions. The archbishop of Prague, alarmed at the progress of the new tenets, commanded all who had in their possession any of Wickliffe’s writings, to bring them to him ; when copies of different parts of his works were brought, to the number of two hundred ; all of which, the right reverend father condemned to the flames. Similar contemptible measures were adopted in other places, and undoubtedly with similar success.

Notwithstanding the manifest injustice and cruelty of the

* Fox, vol. i. p. 511.

† Ibid. 514.

pope and the hosts of his coadjutors, the seed which was sown by Wickliffe could never be smothered and destroyed. Like an acorn planted in the earth, being watered with the dew of heaven, it took root, sprang up, and became a mighty tree; its branches extended throughout Europe; and thanks be to God! nearly all the kingdoms of the world now begin to place themselves beneath its peaceful and happy shade. The nations of Europe and of the world, owe their deliverance from midnight darkness, from infatuated superstition, and from mental slavery, to the generous and dignified principles, and the disinterested and unexampled energies of John Wickliffe; therefore a monument, as durable as time, ought to be erected in every Christian's breast, in honourable and grateful remembrance of his name; and all consistent Protestants, who appreciate real worth, will esteem and revere his memory, as the most distinguished benefactor to the world and the church of God, since the days of the apostles.

The lofty claims of the pope, by intrenchments on the crown and the rights of the people, were grown so enormous, that the nation found it indispensably necessary to retrench his usurpation by the adoption of some decisive measure. The kings of England were as absolute, their prelacy and clergy as learned, their nobility as valiant, and their commons as wealthy, as any in Christendom; yet, had not some laws of provision now been made, England had long since been turned into the patrimony of St. Peter; yea, had not such prudential measures been adopted, the sceptre would have been wrested out of the hands of her monarchs, her prelates have been made the pope's chaplains, her nobility his servants, and her commons his slaves.*

The pope's claiming the disposal of ecclesiastical benefices, without waiting till they became vacant, mostly conferred them upon foreigners, his own creatures, who were to take possession upon the death of the existing incumbents. This ecclesiastical fraud coming from the pretended infallibility of St. Peter's chair, raised loud complaints in the parliament, and among the patrons of livings, as well as from the people. His holiness defended what he and his predecessors had done,

* Fuller, b. iv. p. 145.

as the undoubted prerogative of holy see ; but the parliament finding it was in vain to expect the least redress from the court of Rome, resolved to provide against this evil by legislative authority. The memorable statute which they adopted, called the statute of Premunire, cut off all foreign power and authority in conferring benefices, by the following decisive clause :

“ Whereupon our said lord the king, by the assent of his parliament, and at the request of his commons, hath ordained and established, that if any person purchase or pursue, or cause to be purchased or pursued in the court of Rome, or elsewhere, any such translations, processes, excommunications, bulls, instruments, or any other things whatsoever, which touch the king, his crown, his regality, or his realm ; and they which bring within the realm, or them that receive, or make notification thereof, or any other execution whatsoever within or without the realm, that they, their notaries, procurators, maintainers, abettors, and counsellors, shall be put out of the king’s protection, and their lands, tenements, goods, and chattels be forfeited to our lord the king.”*

This decisive measure completely crippled the pope’s power and authority in England. As the learned historian has quaintly expressed it, “ some former laws had *pared the pope’s nails to the quick*, but the statute of *Premunire*, in effect, *cut off his fingers* ; so that hereafter his hand could not grasp and hold such vast sums of money as before.”† This was so dreadful a blow to the encroachments and usurpations of the papacy, that the man of sin never recovered his former dignity and wealth in this country.

The parliament, however, did not stop here, but resolved to press forwards in the good work of reformation. Having tasted the sweets of Wickliffe’s stigmatized tenets, and being persuaded of their beneficial influence upon the nation and the church of God, they were concerned to have the church purified of the fooleries and defilements of superstition, as well as released from a foreign tyrannical yoke. A book of conclusions was, therefore, introduced into the two houses, containing a kind of platform of the intended alterations and

* Fuller, b. iv. p. 147.

† Ibid. 145.

amendments, a specimen of which we have inserted in the following familiar style :

“ Our usual priesthood, which took its original at Rome, and is framed to be a power higher than angels, is not that priesthood which Christ ordained to his disciples. The Romish priesthood is done by signs, pontifical rites and ceremonies, and benedictions, of no force or effect, having no ground in *Scripture* ; and forasmuch as the bishop’s Ordinal, and the New Testament, *do nothing at all agree* ; neither do we see that the Holy Ghost doth give any good gift by any such signs or ceremonies ; because that he, with all noble and good gifts, cannot consist and be in any person of deadly sin. It is, therefore, lamentable and dolorous mockery to wise men, to see the bishops mock and play with the Holy Ghost, in giving their orders : their character is the mark of antichrist, brought into holy church, to cloak and cover their idleness. That a king and a bishop both in one person, a prelate and a justice in temporal causes, a curate and an officer in worldly office, puts every kingdom out of good order. Therefore we the procurators of God in this case do sue unto the parliament, that it may be enacted, that all such as be of the clergy, as well of the highest degree as the lowest, should be fully excused, and occupy themselves with their own cure and charge, and not with others.” In the conclusion they add : “ Wherefore we earnestly desire and beseech God for his goodness sake, that he will wholly reform our church, now altogether out of frame, unto the perfection of her *first beginning* and *original*.”*

The exhibition of these conclusions in parliament, detecting and exposing the ecclesiastical knavery, exceedingly alarmed the bishops and clergy ; who, in their panic, immediately addressed a letter to the archbishop of York, then with the king in Ireland, to hasten his majesty’s return, “ to defend and succour the true faith, and holy church, now in *great danger* of being ruined by heretics, who were contriving to overthrow *canonical* sanctions.” They found no great difficulty in prevailing with the weak and fickle monarch ; who not only cast out the conclusions, but treated the principal persons who

* Fox, vol. i. p. 578—580.

promoted them with great severity, threatening the lives of the famous lords Stury, Clifford, Latimer, and Montague. He caused the first of these personages to take an oath, "that he would never from that day favour or defend any such opinions;" and having taken the oath, the king answered: "I swear again to thee, that if thou dost ever break thine oath, thou shalt die for it a shameful death."*

The copies of Wickliffe's translation of the Bible having obtained an extensive circulation, as already intimated, king Richard and his courtiers were exceedingly offended; and, to suppress these pestiferous books, with the dangerous and infectious heresies they contained, his majesty issued his royal proclamation, commanding his officers to seize "all such books, treatises, and libels;" declaring that whosoever presumed "to maintain, teach, or obstinately defend, publicly or privately, any of these wicked and scandalous opinions, or to keep, transcribe, buy, or sell, any such books, he should be cast into prison, and remain during his majesty's pleasure."†

This oppressive measure was found to be inefficacious. But, to take away the key of knowledge, by effectually suppressing these productions, a bill was soon after brought into the house of lords. This impolitic step, however, met with a warm opposition, particularly from the duke of Lancaster; who said, "We will not be the dregs of all; seeing other nations have the law of God, which is the law of faith, written in their own language." He declared in a most solemn manner, that he would maintain our having this law in our own tongue against those, whoever they were, who brought in the bill. The duke was seconded by others, who said, that if the Gospel, by being translated into English, was the occasion of running into error, they might know that there were more heretics to be found among the Latins, than among the people of any other language. For the Decretals enumerated no less than sixty-six Latin heretics; and so the Gospel, for the same reason, ought not to be read in Latin, which the opposers of the English translation allowed. Upon this powerful opposition, therefore, the bill was thrown out.

These public discussions gave encouragement to those who

* Fox, vol. i. p. 580.

† Collier, vol. i. p. 590.

laboured and prayed for their country's emancipation from its present slavery. The great national troubles, occasioned by the invasion of the Scots, and a change of administration, now engaged the whole attention of the government. The followers of Wickliffe, not insensible of this happy juncture, laboured with becoming zeal and assiduity to promote their doctrines. Their munificent efforts were not in vain. In many parts of the country they had regular congregations, with pastors well qualified for their work, whom they chose to preach the word of life, and to administer the sacraments. These good people, imbibing the spirit, and imitating the example, of the primitive Christians, were the means of diffusing religious knowledge through most parts of the kingdom. The prelates at length employed their holy zeal to suppress them. Henry Spencer, bishop of Norwich, threatened loudly, that if any were found in his diocese, he would make them, as he said, "hop headless, or fry a fagot:" and it is added, that, as "he was a rough and warlike prelate," he would most probably have accomplished his threatening, but they had prudence enough to keep out of his way.*

One of the preachers among these people, a person it seems of distinguished eminence, maintained the following important positions openly in the pulpit at Bristol:—"That every priest ought to omit matins, mass, vespers, and other canonical hours, rather than not have time to preach the word of God; because those offices are only of human institution.—That every priest is authorized *jure divino* to preach the word of God, without any supplemental license from his superiors.—That those bishops and others who discountenance the preaching of the word of God, take these measures to conceal their own misconduct and immoralities.—That no priest ought to forbear preaching, nor any laymen forbear hearing the word of God, on account of being excommunicated."†

Notwithstanding the spirit prevailing in the two houses of parliament, his majesty was a bondsman to the pope and his prelates. The pontiff sent his thundering bulls against the English heretics; and Richard, as an obedient son, received them, listened to their instructions, and, testifying his zeal for

* Kennet, vol. i. p. 265.

† Collier, vol. i. p. 579.

his holiness, immediately proceeded to acts of aggression and persecution against many of his worthy subjects. These pious Christians were apprehended by the bishops' officers, and cast into prison; though it does not appear whether any of them suffered death for the sin of heresy. King Richard had not indeed the opportunity of promoting, in any great degree, the tragic scenes of persecution; for he was soon after deposed from his throne, and sent prisoner first to the tower, then to Pontefract castle, where he was barbarously murdered.*

The prelates and clergy, during this reign, were much more hostile to the allowance of Christian freedom, and the diffusion of religious knowledge, than the monarch on the throne. This might be expected. They knew that "their craft was in danger;" therefore in the various legislative attempts to rescue the nation from a foreign oppressive yoke, and to afford the church a portion of religious liberty, they invariably opposed the humane efforts, and wished all things to continue as they were. Hence, these spiritual gentlemen, more than once, made their open and solemn protestation in parliament, "That they would in no wise assent to any law or statute in restraint of the pope's authority, but would utterly withstand the same;" ordering their protestations to be entered on record.†

Henry IV. succeeded Richard II., when the public affairs were turned into a new channel; the small remains of liberty were totally destroyed; and the fire of persecution was kindled in every corner of the land. The bishops and clergy had now a king exactly suited to their purpose, and ready in all things to gratify their wishes.‡ They did not fail to make use of him as the tool of their tyrannical and base designs. Henry, in his iniquitous act of deposing Richard, and usurping the throne, was assisted by archbishop Arundel. The usurper and the primate, who had both been thought to favour the Reformers, now showed themselves their inveterate enemies. We need not wonder, therefore, that such a king and such a prelate most heartily concurred in the *pious*, but fruitless attempt of exterminating heretics.§

* Fox, vol. i. p. 574—586.—Fuller, b. iv. p. 153. † Fox, vol. i. p. 583, 584.

‡ Ibid. p. 595.

§ Custance, p. 78.

The policy of the king, in taking every possible method to secure the possession of his crown, was the distinguishing trait in his genius; and he had too much discernment not to see how necessary it was to the accomplishment of this object to have the clergy firmly fixed in his interest. They were now become more wealthy, powerful and insolent than at any former period; therefore it was a constant maxim with Henry, to do nothing which might tend in the least to disoblige them, but to embrace every opportunity of testifying his regard for their welfare. He was assured by this means, how ill soever he used his other subjects, he should still preserve the reputation of a pious prince, zealous for the cause and honour of God, which must greatly contribute to baffle every opposition. The clergy had from age to age so connived at the high pretensions of the court of Rome, that many attempts of former parliaments to reform existing abuses, had proved ineffectual. The people groaned for a reformation; so that though the king was obliged at first, in compliance with his parliament, to revive the statutes of premunire, yet the breach of them was never more connived at than under the reign of this prince.

The followers of Wickliffe were now called Lollards, a term of reproach by which heretics had been stigmatized in Germany, and by which all pious Reformers were now distinguished in England. They endeavoured to extirpate all those pernicious evils, which sloth and fraud had introduced into the church.* Their number was greatly multiplied, chiefly by the proceedings of the late reign, which had contributed greatly to open the eyes of the people. The progress of heresy, indeed, proved the inoffensive means of exciting the outrage of the higher orders of the clergy, and, having every thing their own way, they persecuted the pious Reformers with unrelenting cruelty. The laws in existence were deemed insufficient to prevent the growth of heresy, and secure the welfare of the church; therefore the bishops craftily insinuated to Henry, the signal advantage which he would derive by providing a new law for the burning of heretics; and the pliant king, always a slave to ignorance and priestcraft, procured the bloody act, called the statute *Ex Officio*; which authorized and com-

* Echard, p. 159.

manded the bishops to proceed against all persons suspected of being tainted with heresy. Such as were found guilty were to be committed to prison, and to remain “so long as to their *discretion* should be thought expedient, and be fined as they should *think competent* to the offence.” In case they refused to abjure and recant their heretical opinions and practices, the said persons, after the sentence being pronounced, should “be *burned* in the sight of all the people, to the intent that this kind of punishment might be a terror unto others.”*

This was the first law made in England for burning men, who could not with a good conscience measure their religion by the decrees of the Roman antichrist, nor by the standard set up by the English legislature. This was the first time that the English statute book was disgraced by a law to burn human beings, for the singular crime of choosing their religion for themselves. This was the first instance in which the *property*, and even the *life* of every Englishman was left entirely at the disposal of his diocesan, when his religion was his only crime. Thus the bishops were invested by law with power and authority of doing what they pleased with the property and lives of all the people in the land, who scrupulously declined receiving the religion provided by the state.

What use and advantage, then, did their right reverend fathers make of this immense and unexampled trust? When it is recollected that their lordships were not distinguished either for religion or morals; but were extravagantly fond of outward pomp, and the accumulation of wealth, and remarkable for usurpation and cruelty, especially in procuring the barbarous statute; it may without injustice be supposed, that the unbounded trust would be extremely gratifying to their minds, and that they would not fail to make the intended use of it to the utmost of their power. This supposition exactly accords with the page of history. “The bishops left no means unattempted to subvert the right ways of the Lord, and in the diligent execution of the king’s statute; insomuch that it is marvellous how all other laws were neglected, and this only so nearly followed.” They never lost sight of their dignity, and the enlargement of their estates, at the expense of the liberty, the lives, and the property of the people.

* Fox, vol. i. p. 596.

William Sautre, rector of St. Osithe, London, was the first object on whom they wreaked their episcopal vengeance. This reverend and learned divine was convened and examined before archbishop Arundel and the convocation, when his grace pronounced him an obstinate heretic, and, as a heretic, he ought to suffer death. By these terrific proceedings, he was frightened into a recantation; but he was soon terrified out of it by his conscience; and he became more zealous than ever in the cause of true religion. Having formed the generous design of a radical reformation of the church, both in doctrine and discipline, he, with great piety and intrepidity, attended in the upper house of parliament, and presented his petition to the lords, that he might proceed in this great work, for the unspeakable benefit of the nation.* This bold adventure roused the energies of the bishops; when, being again convened before the archbishop and his colleagues, he was deposed and degraded from his ministry, and pronounced an obstinate and incorrigible heretic. Being thrust out of the pope's dominion, and metamorphosed into a layman, he was committed to the secular power; but, not content with this, they urged the king with unceasing importunity to bring him to speedy execution. His majesty, too ready to retain the favour and gratify the wishes of his clergy, issued the terrible writ for his execution, addressed to the lord-mayor and sheriffs of London.†

Sautre was, accordingly, burnt in the year 1400, and was the first in this country who suffered under this act, for the testimony of a good conscience. In this very extraordinary case we see the worst kind of intolerance and barbarity, as well in the first ecclesiastics in the nation, as in the monarch under their influence; who, upon their advice, proceeded, without hesitation, to authorize the murder of one of his best subjects. "Thus it may appear," says the venerable Martyrologist, "how kings and princes have been blinded and abused by the false prelates of the church, in as much as they have been their slaves and butchers, to slay Christ's poor innocent members. Therefore what danger, there is, when princes have not knowledge and understanding themselves;

* Kennet, vol. i. p. 232.

† Fox, vol. i. p. 586—590.

but are led by other men's eyes, and trusting to those guides, who through hypocrisy deceive them, and through cruelty devour the people !”*

Many viewed the horrid death of this holy martyr, as a chariot of fire, in which, like Elijah, his happy spirit ascended the skies. John Badby, an illiterate mechanic, suffered for the same cause, and though the prince of Wales made him the most tempting offers, if he would conform to the faith of holy church, he nobly persisted to give his body to be burned, for that which appeared to him a purer faith. Even the house of commons was suspected of being tinged with heretical pravity ; for it proposed to the king to seize the church lands, and petitioned for a mitigation of the severities against the Lollards. But the king and the clergy afforded each other mutual support. The lords spiritual and temporal petitioned that justice might be done upon these troubles of Israel ; complaining that unlawful conventicles were held, and preaching in schools and private houses diffused the poison of heresy among his majesty's liege subjects. Wickliffe's bible was secreted as a precious, though forbidden, treasure, and the effects of it appeared in teaching men to despise consecrated walls, to hold assemblies wherever they could hear the Scriptures explained, and offer worship to God according to his holy instructions, through “ one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” These were the nonconformists of their day : and their numbers were so great, that it was deemed impossible to provide prisons sufficient to contain them.

The prelates, besides their continued care and assiduity in the execution of the memorable statute, were no less industrious in making *additions* to it, from time to time, by devising new ecclesiastical constitutions ; and even as soon as the statute was passed, archbishop Arundel made an addition of *thirteen* constitutions, equally barbarous and bloody as the statute itself. These are preserved on record, but too long to be recited ; only one particular it may not be improper to notice : “ We will and command, that no book or treatise made by John Wickliffe, or any other, be from henceforth

* Fox, vol. i. p. 586—590.

read in schools, halls, hospitals, or other places whatsoever, within our province of Canterbury, except the same be first examined by the university of Oxford or Cambridge. It is a dangerous thing to translate the text of the holy Scripture out of one tongue into another ; we, therefore, decree and ordain, that no man hereafter by his own authority translate any text of the Scripture into English, or any other tongue, by way of book or treatise ; and that no man read any such book or treatise, lately set forth by John Wickliffe, or hereafter to be set forth, in part or in whole, privately or openly, upon pain of the greater excommunication !”*

Popery was now become so formidable, that the Reformers were extremely circumspect in all their communications. The bishops having the king on their side, and being armed with laws and constitutions, with fire and fagot, reigned and ruled as they pleased, and considered themselves as lords of the property and consciences of the people. “ So strong were they in power, that no human force could withstand them ; and so exalted in pride and vain-glory, that they concluded all things to be subject to their authority.” Whatsoever they decreed, they expected all men to receive and obey. Such, indeed, was their superstitious vanity and blindness, that whatsoever frivolous trifle entered their fancy, it was presently established for law, to be observed by all. This was manifest to all beholders. The archbishop of Canterbury and his brethren having obtained a little leisure from slaying the innocent people of God, directed their thoughts to invent and obtrude upon the church new ceremonies and customs, as ornaments to religion, and improvements to the worship of God. With these supercilious traditions and impositions of men, the church of England was exceedingly pestered for many ages, and has never been entirely released from them to this day.†

The foregoing barbarous statute and constitutions being so

* Fox, vol. i. p. 596—600.

† The pomp, and pride, and superstition of the prelates were so glaring and ridiculous, that archbishop Arundel passing through the city of London, waited for the ringing of the bells of all the churches, in token of his majesty and triumph ; but many of the bells were totally silent ; for which offence he pronounced, in great displeasure, the sentence of suspension against all the steeples and churches whose bells had not revered and honoured him !—Fox, vol. i. p. 632.

permanently established, and so vigilantly executed, who could have thought that the name, or even the memory, of the persecuted, would have remained unextinguished? But God's ways are not as men's ways, nor his thoughts as their thoughts. He often causeth the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of wrath he will restrain. So in the instance before us, to the honour of divine grace, the more the outward tribulations of his people increased, the more their inward consolations abounded; and the farther they seemed from the joys of this life, the nearer was the Lord with his grace, to confirm and comfort their souls: yea, the more the servants of God were harassed and persecuted, the more they multiplied and increased daily; especially in London, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Herefordshire, Shropshire, and various other places. Some indeed recanted, and carried fagots at Paul's cross; but multitudes stood firm and unshaken under all the cruelties inflicted upon them.*

In the former class was John Purvey, a man of great celebrity; but being "grievously tormented and punished in the prison of Saltwood," at length recanted at Paul's cross. He lived in the time of Wickliffe, and is called "The Library of Lollards and Glosser on Wickliffe." He was thoroughly conversant with the opinions of the great Reformer; and, to the day of his death, was unwearied in his labours to promote them: especially the following:—"That auricular confession, or private penance, destroys the liberty of the Gospel, and was brought in by the pope and his clergy, to entangle men's consciences in sin, and draw their souls to hell:—That many prelates and clergy live wickedly, contrary to the doctrine and example of Christ and his apostles; therefore, they have not the keys of heaven and hell, nor ought any Christian to esteem their censure of any force: Yea, though the pope should interdict the realm; yet could he not hurt, but profit us; for as much as we should thereby be dismissed from observing his laws, and from saying the service according to the custom of the church:—Whosoever taketh upon him the office of priest, although he have not the charge of souls according to the custom of the church, not only may, but ought, to preach the

* Fox, vol. i. p. 600, 631.

Gospel freely to the people ; otherwise he is a thief, and excommunicated of God and the church :—The popes, bishops, and clergy, in making so many laws and ceremonies, were fools and seducers of Christians ; but we ought not to believe their determinations, nor obey their laws, except they be plainly grounded upon the *holy Scripture*.”*

We have already noticed how Wickliffe’s views of the Gospel, had entered the two houses of parliament. When the king wanted money, the commons took occasion to renew their address to his majesty upon the state of the clergy, and their petition in favour of the persecuted Lollards. In the former, they set forth the enormous revenues of churchmen, which were spent in unnecessary worldly pomp and grandeur ; but if his majesty would take away these burdensome offices and estates, the kingdom would be in a better state of defence, more ample provision would be made for the poor, and the clergy would be more observant of the duties of their function : in the latter, they prayed that the statute for burning heretics might either be repealed, or at least receive some favourable alterations. The reader will easily conjecture what kind of treatment these public guardians would meet with from the various orders of clergy, and from the historians who have recorded these transactions. The names of Lollard and heretic were plentifully distributed, and the petitions were condemned as laying the axe at the root of all religion ! This they insinuated to the king, with all the aggravating circumstances which party-prejudice and self-interest could suggest. The king, whose interest was combined with that of the clergy, answered the commons with sharpness, that he would not consent to their petitions, and prohibited them expressly from meddling any more with the affairs of the church. This righteous king reminded them that, so far from repealing the statute against the Lollards, he wished that its rigours might be increased, and that heresy might be entirely rooted out of the kingdom.

One very conspicuous trait is, indeed, recorded of the higher clerical orders of these times. By the tyranny and intrigues of the crown, persons of distinction were not unfrequently

* Fox, vol. i. p. 618, 619.

impeached of high treason, and tried for the greatest crimes against the state ; on which occasions the bishops pretended to be so tender in the cause of blood, that they withdrew and alleged in their defence the prohibitions of the canons of the church : but these very bishops were so sanguinary, that they made themselves the only judges in cases of heresy, where life was forfeited in the most cruel manner, in direct opposition to the canon of Scripture. Could it be thought a blemish in the character of an ecclesiastic, to assist in the condemnation of a traitor to the scaffold, who had been guilty of murder and subversion of the laws ; and could the same ecclesiastics be allowed without blame, to convict heretics and deliver them to the most abhorrent kind of death, when their religion was their only crime ? Those who could think thus, my author adds, were hypocrites, or else blinded by those “ who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.” But these bishops, who had petitioned for the bloody statute, had divested themselves, not only of that mercy which was essential to their sacred character, but also of the charity and forbearance of Christianity, and of the good-nature of Englishmen. To burn men for no other reason, than that they would not renounce what appeared to them to be important truth, and an essential part of their allegiance to God, was a species of cruelty at which human nature shudders.* But the poor Lollards, who incurred the unrelenting displeasure of the bishops, by broaching doctrines repugnant to their temporal grandeur or secular interest, were without mercy cast into the flames ; and the churches through the land sounded with encomiums of the king, who had given such unquestionable proof of his zeal and piety, that he was esteemed the champion of religion, and the darling of the priesthood. Though he was a cruel and oppressive tyrant, and placed on the throne by the good-will of the parliament, whose rights he constantly endeavoured to subvert ; yet he was applauded by the clergy as a prince endowed with mildness, piety, and all the other virtues ornamental to the character of man.

Upon the death of king Henry IV. in the year 1413, his son, Henry V., succeeded to the crown. The clergy, ever

* Warner, vol. i. p. 524, 526.

awake to their own secular advantage, were determined to obtain security against all future attempts to diminish their revenues, by seizing and improving to their own interest, that complaisance which is usually found in young princes upon their accessions to their thrones. They were persuaded that such attempts had greatly promoted the doctrine of the Lollards. Therefore, as those principles were countenanced by men of the first rank, and of the highest reputation in the kingdom, they resolved to lay the axe to the root of the tree, and by boldly attacking the patrons of these reformists, deter all others from presuming to advance those opinions which they disapproved. The first object of their indignation, was the excellent lord Cobham, the most popular man in the kingdom. He was a person of the first eminence, and a constant friend and supporter of the pious Reformers. He expended large sums of money in transcribing Wickliffe's writings, which he caused to be dispersed into every corner of the land, and through the different nations of Europe. He, moreover, supported a great number of Wickliffe's disciples, as itinerant preachers in many parts of the country, particularly in the dioceses of Canterbury, London, Rochester, and Hereford. He took so little pains to conceal his opinions, and acted in so public a manner, that he was considered as the head and pillar of the reforming party; consequently he drew upon himself the resentment of the bigoted ecclesiastics, and was to them the most obnoxious person in the kingdom.

The convocation which assembled the first year after his majesty's accession, was principally under the direction and influence of archbishop Arundel. The chief subject of their debate was the growth of heresy, but the great object of the archbishop was the destruction of lord Cobham; for it was presumed, that, if his ruin could be effected, it would strike terror into all who adhered to the same opinions. But, as lord Cobham was in favour with the king, and very popular at court, the enterprise required great caution. The sagacious prelate first sounded the king's sentiments, by requesting an order from his majesty to send commissioners to Oxford, to inquire into the growth of heresy; to which request the king had no objection.

Oxford was at this time the seat of heresy. Wickliffe was

still remembered there with gratitude and esteem; and his learning, eloquence, fortitude, and unwearied labours in the cause of unadulterated truth and religious freedom, had made a deep impression, and were still objects of admiration. His tenets had spread widely among the students, whose ingenuousness rendered them more open to conviction. Nor, indeed, was it uncommon to hear his opinions publicly maintained in the schools. The governing party of the university were, however, firmly attached to the established order.

The commissioners were respectfully received at Oxford; and, having made their necessary inquiries, they returned with the particulars to the archbishop, who laid them before the convocation. Long debates immediately ensued. The result was, that heresy was greatly increased, which was particularly owing to the influence of lord Cobham, who not only avowed his heretical opinions, but encouraged scholars from Oxford and other places, by bountiful stipends, to propagate those opinions in the country. In the conclusion, it was determined, that without delay a prosecution should be commenced against him. Into this hasty measure the convocation would have run, had not a cool and politic head among them suggested, that, as lord Cobham was not only a favourite, but even a domestic at court, it was highly improper to proceed farther in this business, till application had been made to the king. This advice prevailed; and the archbishop, at the head of a large procession of dignitaries, waited upon Henry. His grace insinuated to the king the amazing growth of heresy, which could not fail to draw down the wrath of heaven on the kingdom; and the great glory that would reflect on a young monarch to commence his reign by engaging in the cause of God, and defending the church against heretics, for which God would assuredly crown all his enterprises with success. The archbishop, therefore, with more acrimony than decency, laid before the king the offence of his servant lord Cobham, and begged his majesty would suffer them for Christ's sake to put him to death.

Henry has not unjustly been charged with cruelty; but, in this instance, he showed a spirit of lenity. With great coolness, he told the furious arch-bishop, that although he had a particular desire to uphold the church, and was sensible that

unity was the life of Christianity ; yet he had ever been averse from shedding human blood in the cause of religion ; and he thought that the most prudent method to convince those who erred, “ was mild persuasion and convincing arguments.”* Violence, in his opinion, was more destructive of truth than of error. He enjoined the convocation, therefore, to postpone the affair a few days ; in which time he would himself reason with lord Cobham, whose behaviour he by no means approved ; and if his efforts should prove ineffectual, he would then leave him to the censures of the church.

With this answer the primate seemed satisfied ; and the king sending for lord Cobham, endeavoured by all the arguments in his power, to set before him the high offence of separating from the church ; and pathetically exhorted him to retract his errors. Cobham’s religious principles were too deeply rooted to be shaken by his majesty’s arguments ; and his regard for the unadulterated truth and liberty of the Gospel, were too great for him to sacrifice in base complaisance to the wishes of his sovereign. He knew that the religion of Jesus, not only allowed him to think and determine for himself, but also laid him under indispensable obligation so to do ; therefore he thus replied to the reasoning and advice of the king :—“ I ever was a dutiful subject to your majesty, and I hope ever shall be. Next to God, I profess obedience to my king. But as to the spiritual dominion of the pope, I never could see on what foundation it is claimed, nor can I pay him any obedience. As sure as God’s word is true, to me it is fully evident, that he is the great antichrist foretold in holy writ.”

This bold and unexpected answer so exceedingly shocked the king, that, turning away in visible displeasure, he withdrew from that time every mark of favour from the heretical courtier. He now gave the archbishop leave to proceed against him, with the utmost extremity, and, as Bale says, “ according to the devilish decrees, which they call the laws of holy church.”

The vast superiority which the prelates had obtained, in the parliament, in the cabinet, and, consequently, in the church, laid almost every murmur asleep ; and they even boasted in

* Kennet, vol. i. p. 310.

the language of the prophet, that “not a dog durst move his tongue against them.” Lord Cobham was presently apprehended by the archbishop, arraigned before him, treated with insult, and committed to the tower. Placed in these perilous circumstances, he foresaw his fate. Having received the holy sentence of condemnation, he was dragged to the place of execution. St. Giles’ fields was the spot appointed for the outrageous tragedy; where both as a traitor, and a heretic, he was hung in chains upon a gallows, and then burnt to death in the presence of the people.* This valiant champion for truth and liberty submitted to his tragical death, “with the utmost bravery and most triumphant joy, exhorting the people to follow the instructions which God had given them in the Scriptures; and to disclaim those false teachers, whose lives and conversation were so contrary to Christ and his religion.”†

Such was the unworthy fate of this man; who, though in every respect the ornament of his country, fell a sacrifice to the unfeeling outrage and barbarous superstition of tyrannizing prelates. His character and sufferings were a principal means of giving stability to the opinions he embraced. And while he made it appear, that religion was not merely calculated for a cloister, but might be introduced into the higher circles of fashionable life; he gave the world the most convincing proof, that it was not beneath a person of his rank to endure every kind of insult, and even death itself, for the sake of those inviolable rights which exclusively subsist between God and a man’s own conscience. The whole behaviour of Henry towards his greatest favourite, “a man of consummate probity,” gives no favourable idea of his integrity, since he acted in direct opposition to his own declared sentiments, and sacrificed a man for whom he had the highest esteem; in which his object was to secure the interest of the clergy, and thus to pave the way for the accomplishment of his own ambitious projects.

The barbarous persecution of lord Cobham presents the reader with a correct view of the ecclesiastical usurpations and oppressions of this period. He was not, however, the only person who felt the vengeance of the bigoted and superstitious

* Fox, vol. i. p. 637—668. 731.—Gilpin’s Lives, vol. i. p. 105—137.

† Custance, p. 81.

prelates. Many others, pious and faithful servants of God, who could not yield their consciences and their souls to the servitude of existing impositions, fell a sacrifice to furious and infatuated bigotry.*

These encroachments and oppressions had no bounds. The unjust and inhuman methods adopted by the bishops in the persecution of these good people, is not unworthy of remembrance. In their proceedings against them, they always mixed some capital errors, which all Christians rejected, with those of which they accused them; and some particulars being proved, they gave it out that they were guilty of all, to represent them the more odious!† By the terrors which these unrelenting cruelties diffused through the kingdom, the pious Reformers were for a time almost annihilated. They were hunted down, and their books searched after and destroyed. In this gloomy period nothing but bonds, imprisonment, and death awaited those who dared to reject the errors of popery, and profess a more scriptural faith. It would be endless to recount the names of those pious persons, who, in this age, sealed the truth with their blood. Suffice it to say, that whilst great numbers cheerfully sacrificed their lives rather than make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, the flames with which they were encircled, cast a luminous glory around the dying martyrs, and rendered their Christian heroism powerfully impressive on those who beheld their faith and patience, and who shuddered with equal horror at their bloody executioners, and the clergy who were the instigators of these cruelties.‡

The Lollards were not the only persons who were convinced of the necessity of lessening the power of churchmen; but the parliament, which had agreed to the severest statutes against them, now discovered their determination to reduce the clergy within more proper bounds. The clergy took care, however, to stigmatize all who opposed their secularity and worldly grandeur by the obnoxious name of Lollards; and, to render them and their designs the more odious, they represented them as acting upon heretical principles; in the same manner as in later times, they who discovered their zeal for emancipation from the

* Fox, vol. i. p. 669, 748—753.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 29.

‡ Custance, p. 82.

arbitrary measures of church and state, were branded with the odious name of puritans. "The clergy," says my author, "having their authority fortified with such severe laws, were now more cruel and insolent than ever. And if any man denied them any part of that respect, or of those advantages, to which they pretended, he was presently brought under suspicion of heresy, and vexed with imprisonments, and articles were brought against him."*

These disgraceful and monstrous proceedings, professedly under the dictation of infallibility, and in support of what was called "the only true church of Christ," were carried on for many generations. The faithful page of our venerable Martyrologist, has detailed the awful facts, which are sufficient to move any hearts except those of stone. It is, indeed, peculiarly reviving, amidst these dark and oppressive scenes, to behold a beam of light dart across the dismal gloom, promising a rising sun to dispel the clouds of ignorance and error. Wickliffe stands among the foremost, whose labours tended to enlighten the sphere in which he moved, and unbolt the gates of truth, which, for generations, had been shut by the seclusion of the oracles of God from the sight of the people. But it was in the reign of king Henry VI., son and successor of Henry V., that an event transpired of incalculable importance to the republic of letters, to the diffusion of Christian knowledge, and to the restoration of the rights of conscience: the reader will easily guess, that this was the *Invention of PRINTING*. It was first discovered and practised, in the year 1450, or 1455, by one John Faustus, a goldsmith, at Mentz in Germany; and was afterwards introduced into this country by the celebrated William Caxton.

The prelates and clergy were soon alarmed at the consequences resulting from this invention. They clearly saw it would make the people *too knowing* to continue their souls in tame submission to existing oppressions. Complaint was presently carried to the pope, "That his holiness could not be ignorant what effects the invention of printing had produced; for men now began to call in question the *present faith and tenets of the church*, and to examine how far religion had

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 27.

departed from its primitive institution. What was particularly to be lamented, they had exhorted the laity even to *read the Scriptures*, and to *pray in their vulgar tongue*. That if these things were suffered, the common people might at last believe that there was *not so much need of the clergy*; for if men were once persuaded, they could make their *own way to God*, and that prayers in their *ordinary* language might pierce heaven, as well as those in *Latin*: how much would the authority of the *mass* fall? And how prejudicial might this prove to all ecclesiastical orders?"*

The following observations on this subject, exposing the ecclesiastical oppressions and infatuated superstitions, are submitted to the reader's perusal:—"By printing," says John Fox, "tongues are known, knowledge groweth, judgment increaseth, books are dispersed, the Scriptures are seen, the doctors are read, stories are opened, times compared, truth discerned, falsehood detected, and all through the benefit of printing. Wherefore I suppose, that either the pope must abolish printing, or he must seek a new world to reign over; for else, as this world standeth, printing will doubtless abolish him. But the pope and all his college of cardinals, must understand, that through the light of printing the world beginneth now to have eyes to see, and heads to judge: he cannot walk so visible in a net, but he will be spied. Although by power he before stopped the mouth of John Huss and of Jerome, that they might not preach, thinking to make his kingdom sure; yet, instead of John Huss and others, God hath opened the press to preach, whose voice the pope is never able to stop with all the puissance of his triple crown. By this printing, as by the gift of tongues, and as by the singular organ of the Holy Ghost, the doctrine of the Gospel soundeth to all nations and countries under heaven; and what God revealeth to one man, is dispersed to many, and what is known to one nation, is opened to all."†

About the time that printing was discovered, was the iniquitous persecution of Reignald Peacock, the learned and pious bishop of Chichester. He had openly declared in his sermons at Paul's cross, That the office of a Christian prelate

* Kennet, vol. ii. p. 60.

† Fox, vol. i. p. 803.

is chiefly, and above all things, to preach the word of God.—That human reason is not to be preferred above the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.—That the use of the sacraments, as they are now administered, is worse than the use of the law of nature.—That the bishops, who buy their admissions of the bishop of Rome, commit sin.—That no man is bound to believe and obey the determination of the church of Rome.—That the riches of the bishops, are the goods of the poor.—That of the four senses put upon the Scripture, none is to be taken but the first and proper sense.—That the authority of the ancient fathers is to be held in very little estimation.—And that the wilful begging of friers, is to be condemned as idle and needless.

This daring prelate felt the tenderest sympathy for the people overwhelmed in ignorance and superstition ; and, to alleviate their misery, he trod in the steps of Wickliffe, and laboured many years in translating the Bible into English. For his generous endeavours to benefit society, and to promote the prosperity of the Christian church, he was exceedingly despised and hated by most of his brethren ; but he continued unmolested so long as he enjoyed the favour and protection of the duke of Gloucester, through whom he obtained his promotion.* This honourable patron of piety and learning, however, was no sooner laid in the grave, than Peacock, for preaching the above doctrines, was convened before the archbishop and his colleagues, when his opinions were stigmatized “ dangerous and damnable heresies,” and he was required to make a debasing recantation openly at Paul’s cross, when all his books were burnt before his eyes. He was then detained a prisoner for life ; and he was murdered in prison by his unfeeling persecutors.†

The church of England continued under these spiritual usurpations and oppressions, with little or no alteration, through the successive reigns of king Edward IV., Edward V., Richard III., and Henry VII. The last of these princes, is said to have been submissive to the pope, but not servile ; for “ his devotion was seldom without design ; so using his holiness, that he seldom stooped to him with any

* Kennet, vol. i. p. 415.

† Fox, vol. i. p. 806.

low reverence, but he took up something to answer his own ends." He was particularly respectful to his clergy, trusting and employing them in state affairs, more than his nobility. But to the poor persecuted Lollards, he was more cruel than his predecessors; for not only at the beginning of his reign did he connive at the barbarities inflicted upon them by the bishops, but, towards the close of it, he treated them with the most wanton cruelty.

This prince, being shocked to find his kingdom eaten up by foreign locusts, intruded into all the ecclesiastical benefices by popish reservations, resolutely set himself to resist the usurpations of Rome, the parliament affording their co-operation by strongly remonstrating against this papal plunder. These noble attempts seem to have failed; and the dread of anathemas from his holiness still held the nation in a state of grievous thralldom. A few, and only a few, emancipated their minds from these oppressive terrors. These happy commencements did not indeed stop here. The works of Wickliffe, as we have observed, crossed the seas, and were eagerly read and circulated on the continent. The famous John Huss, and Jerome of Prague fell martyrs for the truth: but multitudes in Bohemia and other countries cordially embraced their opinions, and promoted, with becoming zeal, the great work of spiritual emancipation.

In England the minds of men in general, being debased by ignorance, and enslaved by superstition, were prepared without examination to acquiesce in the claims of authority, and tamely to submit to every yoke. Popery has always been found adverse to religious freedom. The Romish court, while it aimed directly at the establishment of spiritual despotism in the hands of ecclesiastics, contributed to rivet the chains of political servitude upon the people. In return for the support which princes yielded to its arrogant claims, it was content to invest them with an absolute authority over the bodies of their subjects. By the priestly unction, performed at the coronation of kings in the name of the holy see, a sacred character was understood to be communicated, which raised them to a superiority over their nobility not possessed in the feudal ages, and rendered their persons inviolable, and their office divine. Although the sovereign pontiffs claimed, and, on dif-

ferent occasions, exercised the power of dethroning kings, and of absolving subjects from their allegiance; yet any attempt of this kind from the people, was denounced as a crime deserving the severest punishment in this world, and damnation in the next. Hence sprung the divine right of kings to rule independently of their people, and passive obedience and non-resistance to their will; under the sanction of which they were encouraged to sport with the lives and happiness of their subjects, and to indulge in the most tyrannical and wanton acts of oppression, without the dread of resistance, or of being called to an account by any power on earth. Hence it was easy for a powerful and ambitious monarch to violate the rights of the people with impunity, and to establish an administration completely despotic and arbitrary. It is to the religious spirit which afterwards spread so rapidly throughout Britain, and diffused itself among all classes of men, that we are chiefly indebted for the propagation of the genuine principles of religious freedom, and the consequent melioration of the government, with the peace and happiness of society. Henry VII. died in the year 1509.

From the foregoing events, the reader will behold, as in the light of day, the principles of spiritual usurpation, together with the intolerant and antichristian spirit which they invariably betray. Ignorance, uncharitableness, bigotry, and persecution have constantly been the baneful effects of those principles. The Romish, as well as other clergy, when divested of power, can with great ease assume appearances of charity and moderation; but these appearances deserve no regard. We are constrained to make our appeal to a more just and righteous tribunal, by an examination of the antichristian principle on which all spiritual dominion is founded, and of the practice invariably flowing from it; and, by this most just process, it appears to be an incontrovertible fact, grounded on the most clear and satisfactory evidence, that whenever the church has possessed a sufficient degree of *power*, its charity and moderation have been overbalanced by a flaming zeal for its own superstitious inventions, its corrupt impositions, and the extirpation of what it is pleased to call error or heresy. To accomplish these pious frauds, the catholic church has seldom scrupled to employ the axe and the wheel, the gibbet and the stake.

We also clearly see from the foregoing pages, what a long and dreary night overspread and almost destroyed the church of God. But amidst the general apostacy, the great Head of the Church, who takes care of the fowls of heaven and the lilies of the field, took care of his own cause, and reigned in his own kingdom. He raised up and richly endowed his own servants, from one generation to another; and sent them forth with something like apostolic zeal, maintaining the rights of God and of conscience. These holy men, with the book of life in their hands, and the grace of God in their hearts, attempted to illuminate the country overspread with darkness, to convince the people of their innumerable superstitions, and to deliver the nation from its long and intolerable slavery. God was pleased to honour and bless their labours. Although they went "as sheep among wolves," and were treated with the worst kind of inhumanity and barbarity, especially by those who ought to have known better; yet God supported and comforted them in the mighty conflict, and increased daily the number of true converts to Christ. Notwithstanding the severe and continued persecutions of these dark ages, the seed was sown that could not die, but was kept alive through a long and dreary winter; yea, the doctrines of Christian freedom were, in numerous instances, even in these gloomy and oppressive times, wonderfully triumphant over the grossest superstition and most barbarous cruelty. The early Reformers were much better acquainted with the only grounds of religious liberty and the rights of conscience, than could have been expected; for they invariably maintained, that every man was bound to think and judge for himself on all religious subjects, and that the Word of God was the only test of Christian doctrine and practice, to the exclusion of human control.

The whole system of popery is founded on the arrogant usurpation of man; and persecution and the suppression of the rights of conscience, were the only weapons by which its interested supporters were able to defend this system of corruption and imposture. Every avenue by which truth might enter was guarded as carefully as possible, by the bishops and the inferior clergy. Learning was branded as the parent of heresy. The most frightful pictures were drawn of

those who separated from the Romish church, and held up before the eyes of the people, to deter them from imitating their example. If any person, who had attained a degree of illumination amidst the general darkness, began towards the close of this period to make known his dissatisfaction with existing corruptions, and to propose the correction of abuses, he was immediately stigmatized as a heretic; and, unless he secured his safety by flight, was immured in a dungeon, or committed to the flames.

The state of religion at this time was truly deplorable. The functions of the ministry were generally neglected, and gross ignorance prevailed. All ranks of men were extremely depraved in their morals, and the pope's penitentiary had published the price of every crime, as it was rated in the tax-book of the Roman chancery. Marriages, which reason and scripture allowed, the pope prohibited, and for money dispensed with those which both forbade. Church benefices were sold to children and to laymen, who then let them to undertenants, none of whom performed the duty for which the profits were paid; but having obtained them by simony, they spent their lives in fleecing the flock to repay themselves.

The Roman pontiff claimed an infallibility of knowledge, and an omnipotence of strength, forbidding the world to examine his arrogant claims. He was addressed by titles of blasphemy, and though he owned no jurisdiction over himself; yet he affected to extend his authority over heaven and hell, as well as over a middle place called purgatory, of all which places, he said he kept the keys. This irregular church polity was attended with quarrels, intrigues, schisms, and wars. The pillars, that supported this edifice, were immense riches, arising, by imposts, from the sins of mankind; idle distinctions between supreme and subordinate adoration; senseless axioms, called the divinity of the schools; cruel casuistry, consisting of a body of dangerous and scandalous morality; false miracles and midnight visions; spurious books, and paltry relics; oaths, dungeons, inquisitions, and crusades. The whole was styled, **THE HOLY, CATHOLIC, AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH**, and laid to the charge of Jesus Christ.

From this sketch of the deplorable state of religion and religious freedom, we may see how false is the representation

which some persons would impose upon us ; as if popery were a system, erroneous indeed, but purely speculative ; superstitious, but harmless ; provided it had not been accidentally accompanied with intolerance and cruelty. The very reverse is the truth. It may be safely affirmed, that there is not one of its erroneous tenets, or of its superstitious practices, which was not either originally contrived, or afterwards accommodated, to advance and support some practical abuse ; to aggrandize the ecclesiastical order, secure to them immunity from civil jurisdiction, sanctify their encroachments upon secular authorities, vindicate their usurpations upon the consciences of men, cherish implicit obedience to the decisions of the church, and extinguish free inquiry and liberal science.

All these evils were brought into active operation. Superstition was become triumphant. Power was in the hands of oppressors. Abuses were grown inveterate by ages of prescription. The clergy were corrupt beyond conception. Ignorance maintained its throne with sacred jealousy. Learning itself was not allowed to pry into the mysteries of iniquity established by law and custom. A feeble band, however scattered and distressed, struggled for life, through these gloomy generations, and, preserved by a divine and gracious Providence, kept alive the vital spark of religion. The fire long smothered, was now ready to burst into a flame ; and being destined to consume the wood, hay, stubble, of superstition and intolerance, it will continue to “ shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.”

CHAPTER II.

THE REIGN OF KING HENRY VIII.



SECTION I.

The Diffusion of Liberal Principles opposed by Henry and his Bishops.

ON the accession of king Henry VIII., son of Henry VII., religious liberty may be considered as totally suppressed, and pure religion itself as deplorably obscured or nearly annihilated. The reign of this prince was the era whence the introduction of classical taste into England, may properly be dated. Henry himself received a liberal education, and favoured and promoted men of literary acquirements. This, with the invention of printing, was productive of the best effects; and, as light and knowledge increased, sentiments much more liberal began to be diffused through the nation. The progress was extremely slow, but certain; and required much time, accompanied with many painful struggles, to release the nation in any degree from its mental slavery. This was too much to be expected in one king's reign.

The bishops and clergy were of all persons, the most hostile to Christian toleration. Sunk in superstition, covetousness, and debauchery, and living in the neglect of their cures, they were, with very few exceptions, constantly opposed to every alteration or deviation from the established order.* These vices and iniquities, constituting the leading traits of the principal ecclesiastics, were freely laid open, and justly censured, by the excellent dean Colet, in his celebrated sermon before the convocation. Though the suppression of free inquiry and liberal principles was manifestly the great object of the throne, and of the convocation, the glorious light of truth and righteousness, through an overruling Providence, broke forth on the right hand and on the left.

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 230.

Henry was a prince of mixed character, possessing some of those excellent qualities which adorn the character of man, but accompanied with almost innumerable foibles, and disgraced by the most cruel practices. He was a great wit, a considerable scholar, and well read in scholastic divinity;* but he was a tyrant both in church and state, and extremely passionate, inconsistent, and unstable in all his ways. In more instances than one, he raised persons to the highest pinnacle of honour, grandeur, and wealth; and then, with unexampled vengeance, hurled them down the precipice of destruction. His reign was one continued commotion; in which, however, many events transpired which served greatly to open the eyes of the nation, and to generate better principles in the minds of the people.

It will not be necessary to detail the numerous instances of cruelty and torture inflicted upon the persecuted Lollards, but to give a correct and lucid statement of the situation of Christian liberty under this despotic monarch. Through the various stages of his reign, he imitated or outstripped his predecessors in almost every act of arrogance and barbarity, making himself inquisitor-general and grand judge of heretics. When they were condemned to die, he descended to the office of sitting in judgment upon them; and when they were burning at a stake, it has been said that he feasted his brutal eyes with the shocking spectacle.

The pope and the king were of one heart and one mind, while the nation groaned under oppressive exactions to supply the rapine, luxury, and ambitious projects of the Roman prelates. Unmoved and tranquil, the omnipotent pontiff looked down from his high and lofty throne, treating the murmurs of the people with disdain, and their requests for a reformation with contempt. He was sufficiently armed to punish the refractory, and furnished with every engine of preferment and wealth, to gain the mercenary, to silence the troublesome, and to increase the number of his zealous partisans. Canon law, long prescription, and the universal reverence paid to *Christ's vicergerent upon earth*, surrounded the papacy with an apparently impenetrable barrier. The mighty pontiff sat

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 10, 11.

secure in the exercise of unlimited power, and knew that all redress must come through his hands, be courted as a signal favour, and granted under such conditions as he was pleased to dictate.

The miserable people bound in chains of ignorance and superstition, submitted to the vilest priestcraft, with exemplary patience. Whilst they were amused with the pompous show of the mass, the processions, and the mysteries, they even gloried in the purity of the catholic faith, and indulged a kind of sacred horror at the idea of any alteration in the church. The clergy carefully fostered the people in ignorance, so favourable to their empire, and watched against every attempt to enlighten the minds of the people by the Gospel, or to correct their depraved manners by divine principles. The more profligate the deluded people were, the more they needed absolution, and must apply to their ghostly guides for peace and pardon.

King Henry being one of the most obedient sons of the church, displayed for some years, the most furious zeal in support of its lofty claims, and its gross absurdities. The imperious monarch, indignant at the spread of the reformed doctrines, caused a book to be published against Luther, which he employed others to write, but to which he affixed his own name. For this act of zeal for the catholic church, whoever was the writer, his majesty had the thanks and the reward. Henry's book was presented to pope Leo, with great court ceremony; the English legate took care to panegyryze the royal author as a prodigy of learning, and the pope, to show his high sense of the important service which the king had rendered to the church, conferred upon him the swelling title of "Defender of the faith." Henry's fool beholding his master so overjoyed on this occasion, asked the reason, and being told that it was because his holiness had conferred upon him this new title, he replied, "my good Harry, let thee and me defend each other, and let the faith alone to defend itself."* Harry's jester had read the New Testament, and understood its true character. He was a fool only by profession. Had he been in holy orders, he would have been one

* Fuller, b. v. p. 168.

of the most celebrated preachers of religious liberty, and would probably have exchanged his holy profession for a dungeon and a martyr's crown.

We learn from good authority, that king Henry, before his contest with Luther, had been soliciting the pope to bestow on him some honourable title; and it is even said, that the title of MOST CHRISTIAN MAJESTY had been intended for him, but that the design was prevented by political considerations.* Henry's book, as might have been expected, was magnified by the clergy, "as the most learned work the sun ever saw;" and they compared Henry to king Solomon, and the greatest of Christian emperors. The pompous and flattering reward from his holiness was conferred upon the royal author in the year 1521. Henry afterwards got this bauble united to the crown, by act of parliament; he was weak enough to consider it as one of its brightest jewels; and, curious and inconsistent as it may appear, it is retained to the present time.†

No event could have transpired more gratifying to the baser passions of the king, than when this jewel was thus immutably fixed in his crown. The vanity of his mind was overwhelmed with joy; and the haughty monarch did not fail to testify to the world, the truth and importance of this new title by his own practice. He immediately addressed his letters to his bishops, whom he authorized and urged to employ the most barbarous cruelties against heretics, commanding all his loyal subjects, as they would answer the contrary at their peril, to afford them all the assistance in their power. Henry was a king exactly suited to their wishes. His purposes and their own perfectly accorded. The prince and the prelates, with many of the clergy, were resolved on the extermination of heresy.

Those, therefore, who could not measure their religion by the Romish standard, nor yet by the additions and improvements made in England, had no other prospect than abjuration, or imprisonment and death. The numerous spectacles are too shocking to relate. The bishop of London secretly murdered Richard Hunn, a pious citizen, in prison, but could not be brought to justice; even children were constrained to

* Milner, vol. iv. p. 596. † Fox, vol. ii. p. 57.—Burnet, vol. i. p. 19, 31.

light the fires for the burning of their parents, a species of inhumanity and barbarity never heard of among the most blind and savage pagans.* These unexampled proceedings failed to accomplish the end proposed; and, instead of giving general satisfaction, rendered the lofty claims of churchmen contemptible, inspiring most persons with such detestation of their conduct, as disposed the public to favour the alterations which afterwards followed, especially those which tended to reduce the arrogance and power of the clergy.

Another important event now occurred, which, on the one hand, gave new life to the Reformers, and on the other, called down the vengeance of those in power. Luther's publications having spread through the country, diffusing light and knowledge in every direction; the necessary measures of court were presently adopted to crush the damnable errors and heresies. The king issued his royal proclamation, declaring, "That by the corruption and malice of indiscreet preachers, favourers of erroneous sects, and by certain heretical and blasphemous books privily sent into this realm by the disciples of Martin Luther and other heretics, the king's subjects are likely to be corrupted; unless his highness, as defender of the faith, afford his most gracious help and authority, to accomplish a speedy reformation. His highness, therefore, as a most gracious prince, of his *blessed* and *virtuous disposition*, for the incomparable zeal which he hath to Christ's religion, and for the singular love he beareth to all his good subjects, especially to *the salvation of their souls*, according to his office and duty, intendeth to provide with all convenient expedition, that this his noble realm may be preserved from the said pestiferous, cursed, and seditious errors.

"Forasmuch as his highness is credibly informed, that some of the said errors are already sown and spread within his realm, partly by the corruption of indiscreet preachers, and partly by erroneous books, replete with most venomous heresies, blasphemies and slanders, intolerable to any Christian man; his highness, therefore, as a most gracious and Christian prince, intending the safeguard of his realm, the preservation of his subjects, and the salvation of their souls, willeth now to put

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 9, 24—40.

in execution, with all diligence possible, all good laws, statutes and ordinances, made and ordained by his most noble progenitors, kings of England, for that end and purpose. Which laws and statutes by our sovereign lord and his most honourable council, by long and deliberate advice for the extirpation, suppressing and withstanding of the said heresies, have been seen, examined, and by them in every part thought good, and necessary to be put in execution."

His majesty then expressly prohibits all persons from preaching publicly or privately, and from writing any book or holding any conventicle or assembly, contrary to the catholic church; and from presuming to preach in any case whatever, without a license from the bishop. He commands that all persons defamed or suspected of being guilty of these crimes, should by the bishops be arrested and cast into prison, where they should remain till they proved their innocence, or abjured their errors. He then adds: "If any person, by the law of holy church, be convicted before the bishop or his commissary, that the said bishop may keep in prison the said person so convicted, so long as it shall seem best to *his discretion*; and may set a fine to be paid to the king, by the person convicted, as it shall be thought *convenient to the said bishop*, the said fine to be levied for the king's use. And if any person within the realm of England be convicted of the aforesaid errors and heresies, he shall be committed to the secular jurisdiction, and shall suffer execution according to the laws of this realm."*

The bishops, who procured this terrible proclamation, were no doubt exceedingly gratified with it. Hereby they were authorized by the supreme power to imprison all whom they or vile informers suspected, to detain them as long as they pleased, to make them pay what fines they thought proper, and, if they were obstinate heretics, to deliver them to be burnt at a stake; and my author adds, "neither did they lack any study unapplied, any stone unremoved, any corner unsearched, for the diligent execution of the same: upon which, followed a grievous persecution and slaughter of the faithful." It cannot be supposed, therefore, that the clergy

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 236, 237.

would countenance any reformation which at all abridged their wealth or power ; and what was done towards this great work during the present reign, was in direct opposition to far the greatest part of them.

The representative body in the house of commons, were not unmindful of the rights and privileges of the people, which at this time were so shamefully invaded by the clergy ; therefore they introduced several bills into parliament, as remedies against the disgraceful enormities committed by ecclesiastical persons. These bills were against excessive fines for probates of wills ; extortions for marriages ; priests renting farms, and following trades ; their nonresidence ; and the insufficiency of some who held several benefices, while learned and able men starved. The committee ordered to bring in these bills was composed of the most learned lawyers. The bill against excessive fines having passed the commons, was carried up to the lords ; where it met with violent opposition from the prelates. But because it touched the interest of churchmen, the archbishop of Canterbury and the other bishops began to frown and groan ; insomuch that one of them standing in the parliament chamber, openly protested, “ That such bills were sent up from the commons’ house as tended only to the destruction of the church ; which church being down, the glory of the kingdom must needs fall.” He then desired the lords, for God’s sake, to take example from the kingdom of Bohemia ; for, as it was with the people there, so now what say the commons here, but *Down with the Church !* And all this seems only to be for lack of faith.

These slanderous words being reported to the commons, occasioned a long debate, at the close of which it was resolved, that the speaker, accompanied by thirty principal members of the house, should present an address to the king, complaining how his lordship had dishonoured his majesty and the nation, by saying, that the members who were elected by the counties, cities and boroughs, as the wisest men among them, should be accused, in so august an assembly, of the lack of faith, which was as much as to say they were infidels, or as bad as Turks. Thus would all the pains they take for the good of the commonwealth, have no more regard from the people than if done by Pagans. Wherefore they humbly

prayed his majesty, that the bishop might be obliged to make reparation for the injustice he had done them.*

During the debate in the commons, a celebrated member of the house vindicated the liberty of private judgment as the universal birthright of Christians, and proved, at considerable length, that every man had an undeniable right given him by his Creator to embrace the religion of his own choice, excluding all human control. "Because every man," said he, "is created by God a free citizen of the world, and obliged to nothing so much as to inquire by what means he may attain to everlasting happiness, it will be proper to examine to whose tuition and conduct he ought to commit himself. For, as several teachers present themselves, differing not only in language, habit, and ceremony, but also in doctrine, much circumspection must be used. He will find these guides directing him different ways; and the terrors of everlasting damnation denounced upon him by the different hierarchies and visible churches, if he believe not their doctrines. Shall he then believe that God hath inspired one church and religion only, and deserted the rest? Shall each person, without examination, believe his priest, and then call his doctrine his faith? But, on the other hand, if he must argue controversies before he can be satisfied, how much leisure must he have? How many languages must he learn? How many authors must he read? How many ages must he examine? How many faiths must he scrutinize? How many expositions must he consult? How many contradictions must he reconcile? How many countries must he wander into? And how many dangers must he risk? Would not our life, on these terms, be a continued peregrination, while every man posted into other countries to learn the way to heaven, without, at last, being able to say he had found it? What remains then to be done? Must he take all that each priest would inculcate as the true doctrine, or must he leave all? Certainly, on the one hand, it is impossible to embrace all religions, according to their repugnant rights, tenets, traditions, and faiths; so, on the other, to reject all religions would be impious. It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish. Not that every man must compare all the reli-

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 82.—Hist. of Stuarts, vol. i. p. 63, 64.

gions in the world; but that *every man* must, in his religion, examine and sever the essential parts from the rest, without being moved by the threats or promises of others, who would make him obnoxious, and force him to depart from this way. This is the only ordinary, intelligible, and compendious method of conducting man to his desired end.”*

The two houses with grief beheld the exorbitant power with which the bishops and other churchmen were invested, and the shocking abuse they made of it in the punishment of heresy; therefore the temporal lords and the house of commons concurred in petitioning the king to suppress the growing insolence of the clergy. Upon this, a hearing was appointed before the king, with all the judges and his temporal council. And on this occasion, one of his majesty's council opposed the immunities of the church with so much sound reason and strength of argument, as completely refuted the sentiments of the opposite party, and from which all the laity present derived the most perfect satisfaction. The parliament did not stop here; but introduced a bill to repeal, or rather to alter, the cruel statute of Henry IV. against heretics, which passed both houses, and obtained the royal assent. Though this new statute did not exempt heretics from the sentence of burning, it entirely disabled the prelates from being sole judges in causes of heresy; which, in future, were appointed to be tried and sentence pronounced by the laws of the land. It may be easily conceived how acceptable this act was to the nation, since it proved an effectual limitation of the ecclesiastical power in one of its most uneasy and oppressive parts. This seasonable regulation of the arbitrary proceedings of the spiritual courts, afforded considerable relief to all the friends of truth and liberty, to which those courts were inveterate and powerful enemies.†

The character and conduct of the ecclesiastical rulers, were, in another view, peculiarly oppressive and hateful to the people. Their scandalous exactions and insatiable rapacity were unexampled; and the complaint now addressed to the king, declares, that they had gotten into their hands more than the

* Kennet, vol. ii. p. 137.

† Fox, vol. ii. p. 207.—Hist. of Stuarts, vol. i. p. 83.

third part of all his majesty's realm. In this spirited address, the complainants describe the existing abuses in the following language :

“ Oh the grievous and painful exaction, from which the people of your noble predecessors, the kings of the ancient Britons, ever stood free ! All this will they have, or they will procure him who will not give it them, to be taken as a heretic. What tyrant ever oppressed the people, like this cruel and revengeful generation ? What subjects will be able to help their prince, who are polled after this fashion every year ? What good Christian people can be able to succour us poor lepers, blind, sore, and lame, who are thus yearly oppressed ? Is it any marvel that your people so complain of poverty ? Is it any marvel that the taxes and subsidies, which your grace of most tender compassion hath taken among your people, to defend them from the threatened ruin of their commonwealth, have been so slothfully, yea, painfully levied, seeing almost the uttermost penny hath been already gathered by this ravenous, insatiable generation ?

“ And what do all these greedy, idle, holy thieves, do with these yearly exactions which they take of the people ? Truly nothing, but exempt themselves from the obedience of your grace. Nothing but translate all rule, power, lordship, authority, obedience and dignity, from your grace to themselves. Nothing but that all your subjects should fall into disobedience and rebellion against your grace, and be under them, as they did to your noble predecessor king John ; who, because he would have punished certain traitors that conspired, with the French king, to have deposed him from his crown and dignity, interdicted his land. For which matter your most noble realm hath wrongfully, alas ! stood tributary not to any temporal prince, but to a cruel, devilish blood-sucker, drunken ever since with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Christ.

“ What remedy is there ? Will you make laws against them ? It is doubtful whether you are able. Are they not stronger in your own parliament-house than yourself ? What a number of bishops, abbots, and priors, are lords of your parliament ? Are not all the learned men of your realm in fee with them, to speak in your parliament for them, against your crown, dignity, and realm, a few of your own learned council only

excepted? What law can be made against them that will be available? Who is he, though he be sorely grieved, that, for murder, ravishment, robbery, debt, or any other offence, dare lay it to their charge by way of action? If any one do, he is by and by accused of heresy; yea, they will so handle him, that except he bear a fagot, for their pleasure, he must be excommunicated, and then all his actions will be quashed.”*

This was a bold and pointed exposure of prevailing abuses. The nation felt its heavy burdens, and groaned for deliverance. The celebrated Hugh Latimer, bishop of Worcester, became a firm and zealous advocate of the cause of religious emancipation. He was at first a zealous papist, but afterwards a zealous protestant. He had nothing of the neutral coolness in his temper; but was active in supporting and propagating the Reformed doctrines. His eloquence was at this time every where famous. Upon the opening of the convocation, archbishop Cranmer appointed him to deliver the address to the clergy; and perhaps no man was so well qualified as Latimer to lay before them the corruptions and oppressions of their order, and to rouse them to a better temper. With strong language did the good old bishop endeavour to work upon the assembly, and move his brethren to a right spirit, in order that they might employ their combined energies to deliver the people from the darkness and servitude of existing superstitions.† But the venerable prelate harangued in vain. His address only showed the goodness of his own intentions, and the great objects he wished to accomplish. Eloquence may have influence in questions of sudden determination; but it is not sufficient to overcome old and deep-rooted prejudices. Hugh Latimer, with grief, clearly beheld this on the present occasion.

The forms of the convocation were scarcely settled, when the two parties began to attack each other with great bitterness. The catholics were the aggressors. In the lower house a bill was drawn up, the result of much secret caballing, which contained a catalogue of sixty-seven heretical opinions. Many of these were the tenets of Wickliffe; the rest were the opinions of more modern Reformers. This bill was sent

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 229.

† Gilpin, vol. i. p. 393.

to the upper house, where it met with many zealous advocates. It was there agitated with great animosity on both sides; each party resolving in the first contest to make the other acquainted with all its strength.

In the midst of these discussions, which had lasted many days, each day growing warmer than the preceding, lord Cromwell entered the house, and, addressing himself to the popish bishops, required them in the king's name, to put an end to their opposition. This message instantly extinguished the flame, and gave the Reformers the first intimation of the king's good intentions towards them.* From this moment they were inspired with fresh courage; and they began to declare more openly their sentiments of existing corruptions and oppressions. This they did by the publication of "The Bishops' Book," in which are contained the following bold sentiments:

"It is out of all doubt, that there is no mention made in Scripture, or in the writings of any authentic doctor of the church within the time of the apostles, that Christ did ever make or institute any distinction or difference in the pre-eminence of power, order, or jurisdiction among the apostles themselves, or among bishops themselves; but that they were *all equal in power, order, authority, and jurisdiction*. That there is now, and since the time of the apostles, any such diversity or difference among the bishops, it was devised by the ancient fathers, for the conservation of good order and unity of the catholic church; and by the consent and authority, or at least by the permission and sufferance of princes and civil powers.

"We think it convenient, that all bishops and preachers shall instruct and teach the people committed to their spiritual charge; that Christ did by express words prohibit his apostles and all their successors, under pretence of authority given them by Christ, from taking upon them the authority of the sword: that is to say, the authority of kings, or any civil power in this world. For the kingdom of Christ in his church is a *spiritual*, and not a *carnal* kingdom of the world. The very kingdom that Christ by himself, or by

* Gilpin, vol. i. p. 399.

his apostles and disciples sought here in this world, was to bring all nations from the carnal kingdom of the prince of darkness, to the light of his spiritual kingdom; and so himself to reign in the hearts of the people, by grace, faith, hope, and charity. Therefore Christ did never seek nor exercise any worldly dominion in this world; but rather, refusing and fleeing from it, did leave the said worldly government of kingdoms, realms, and nations, to princes and potentates, and commanded also his apostles and disciples to do the same. Whatsoever priest or bishop will arrogate or presume to take upon him any such authority, and will pretend the authority of the Gospel for his defence, he crowneth Christ again with a crown of thorns, and traduceth and bringeth him forth, with his purple robe, to be mocked and scorned by the world.”*

The bishops' book was subscribed by the two archbishops, nineteen bishops, and a great number of other dignitaries. Notwithstanding this public renunciation of persecution and all spiritual domination, no fact can be more evident, than that, while the prelates thus rejected and opposed the pope, they burnt protestants for rejecting popery. Archbishop Cranmer himself was not guiltless. Previous to his exaltation, and during his abode at the university, Cranmer derived signal advantage from the writings of Erasmus, which all persons of distinction read with great avidity. To the general scholar, they opened a new idea—that of *every man thinking for himself*; and to the student in divinity, they pointed out the *Scriptures* as the *only source* of religious truth. The study of the naked text of Scripture, was followed by a freedom of inquiry to which men in general had been unaccustomed; and those scholars who directed their studies in this *new* channel were commonly called *Scripturists*.†

Cranmer afterwards went abroad, and derived the most valuable instruction from the continental Reformers. He began to think favourably of the reformation before he left England; but, during his abode on the continent, he became an entire convert. That freedom, with which men discussed

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 288.

† Gilpin, vol. ii. p. 6.

religious opinions in Germany, was very agreeable to a man of his liberal mind; and he felt himself every day sitting looser to those prejudices, in which he had hitherto been involved. Osiander, whom he found at Nuremburgh, contributed among others, very much to enlighten his mind. The unrestrained conversation of this foreign Reformer appeared to him, at first, as a kind of libertinism. It sounded with great harshness in his ear; and he usually asked, if such an opinion were false, how it could possibly possess the minds of the greatest and most learned men of all ages, through so long a period? Osiander boldly directed him to still higher antiquity. "Tell me not," said he, "what Austin and Jerome say; but what Peter and Paul say. Read your Bible; and say honestly, whether such and such doctrines are not plainly repugnant to the language and doctrines of *Scripture*."*

Notwithstanding the invaluable lessons which Cranmer received from this liberal and enlightened foreigner, he certainly failed of making a good use of them; as appears from the representation of one, who could not be disposed to record any thing to his disadvantage, if unsupported by sufficient evidence. "Cranmer is accused," says he, "of having a hand in the condemnation and execution of Lambert, Frith, and other godly martyrs." It is much to be regretted that this charge cannot be denied.†

An event transpired in this reign which tended more than any other to disseminate divine knowledge and produce Christian toleration. The diffusion of Wickliffe's translations and other pieces, with the numerous transcript copies, had for several generations kept alive the spark of Christian knowledge and generous principles; but this method of promoting the great work was extremely slow; and, through the violent opposition of the ecclesiastics, and their vigorous efforts to suppress all light and knowledge, it was extremely difficult after so many years to obtain copies of his writings. But, after the invention of *printing*, God honoured the reign of Henry VIII. with the first printed translation of the *Holy Scriptures* into the English language; by means of which, they obtained more extensive circulation, and were read by persons

* Gilpin, vol. ii. p. 18.

† Fuller, b. v. p. 186.

of every class in society. The word of God being in the hands of the people, the effect soon became manifest; the impression made on their minds was favourable to truth and liberty; and a fire was kindled in England which all the bishops and clergy could never extinguish.

This curious invention was at first admired and encouraged on account of its novelty and ingenuity. Princes were its patrons, and men of superior learning and abilities were inspired with generous emulation of excelling each other; they had new motives to the diligent prosecution of their studies, from the prospect of more extensive usefulness, and of transmitting useful knowledge to future generations; and were thus animated by the hope of acquiring, not only present and precarious fame, but lasting honour and a kind of immortality by their writings. Science revived; darkness and superstition fled before it; an inquisitive spirit was promoted; error was detected, and stripped of its venerable disguise. The art of printing was, by an overruling Providence, at that important juncture when it was most wanted; when it was instrumental in breaking the most galling yoke of oppression under which the church of God ever groaned, and in the wide dissemination of Christian truth and liberty.

William Tindal and Miles Coverdale were the principal persons whom God employed in the great work of publishing translations of his holy word. Tindal, deservedly styled "The apostle of England," first published an English translation of the New Testament at Antwerp; when Bishop Tonsal called them in throughout his diocese; and finding this did not succeed, he purchased the whole of the impression, and committed them to the flames at Paul's cross. The sale of this impression enabled the merchant to make an early remittance to the translator, by which he soon printed a larger, and a more correct edition. Tindal himself was reserved, however, to share the same fate as his new Testaments; for in the year 1536, while he and Coverdale were printing the second edition of the Bible, he was apprehended by his countrymen, and burnt as a heretic at Wilford, near Brussels, crying at the stake, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."* Tindal was a man of indefatigable study, ex-

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 301—305.—Strype's Cranmer, p. 81.

traordinary learning, and seraphic piety. His zeal, modesty, and disinterestedness, were so great, that he declared, before he went abroad, "that he should be content to live in any part of England, on an allowance of ten pounds a-year, and bind himself to receive no more, if he might only be allowed to instruct children and preach the Gospel." But this liberty his country would not allow.

When Tindal's Testament was first sent into England, it is said, "Oh! how were the popish clergy cut to the heart! How did their blear eyes smart with the shining of the Gospel in the vulgar tongue! Down must their Dagon fall, if this Ark be set up: down with their Diana, if Paul be permitted to preach to the people. Some said, the Bible ought not to be translated; some, that it could not be translated; and others, that the translation of it would make men *rebel against the king!*"* This opposition against the publication of the book of God prevailed among all who were of a popish and persecuting spirit. The university of Cambridge was not exempt; for that which should have been the seat of learning, was now the seat of ignorance, bigotry, and superstition. There every new opinion was watched with the utmost jealousy; and the translation of the Scriptures was violently opposed; but the pious Latimer disseminated better principles in that university, for which he was soon noticed and stigmatized as an enemy to the established church.†

The first remarkable opposition this zealous Reformer met with from the popish party, was occasioned by a course of sermons which he preached before the university. In these sermons he showed the impiety of indulgences, the uncertainty of tradition, and the vanity of works of supererogation; but he directed his greatest force against the multiplicity of ceremonies with which religion was encumbered; the pride and usurpation of the hierarchy; exposing the great abuse of locking up the Scriptures in an unknown tongue, and showing, at large, that they ought to have been put into the hands of all the people.

Great was the outcry occasioned by these sermons. Latimer was then a preacher of great eminence; and, adapting his new

* Fuller, b. v. p. 224.

† Gilpin, vol. i. p. 342.

doctrine and style of preaching to the capacities of the people, he was much followed by all sober Christians. The dominant clergy seeing this, concluded it was high time to oppose him openly. This task was undertaken by Dr. Buckenham, prior of the black friers, who appeared in the pulpit soon after ; and with great pomp and prolixity, endeavoured to show the dangerous tendency of Latimer's opinions. He particularly inveighed against the heretical notion of having the Scriptures in English, laying open the ill effects of such wanton innovation. " If that heresy," said he, " should prevail, we shall soon see an end of every thing useful among us. The ploughman reading, that if he put his hand to the plough, and should happen to look back, he would be unfit for the kingdom of heaven, would soon lay aside his labour : the baker reading, that a little leaven will corrupt his lump, would give us very insipid bread : the simple man also finding himself commanded to pluck out his eyes, in a few years we should have the nation full of blind beggars."

Latimer could not help listening with secret pleasure to this ingenious reasoning. The vivacity of his mind, and his zeal in the good cause, would not suffer him to conclude that the prior's arguments were unanswerable ; but he was resolved to expose the solemn trifle. Accordingly, the whole university assembled together on the Lord's day, when it was known Latimer would preach. With becoming gravity, he recapitulated the doctor's arguments, placed them in the strongest light, and then rallied them with such a flow of wit and good humour, that, without the appearance of ill-nature, he made his adversary appear in the highest degree ridiculous. He then, with great address, appealed to the people, descanted upon the low esteem in which their holy guides had always held their understandings, expressed the utmost offence at their contemptuous treatment, and wished his honest countrymen might have the use of the Scriptures, only till they showed themselves such absurd interpreters ; and then concluded with a few observations on the use of scripture metaphors. His humourous and animated harangue did not fail to accomplish the end proposed ; for while it shut up the prior in his monastery, it opened the eyes of the people

and increased the reputation of the Reformers in the university.*

Latimer, the moment of his emancipation from the vassalage of popery, became exceedingly zealous in the propagation of his new opinions. Among the instances of his zeal and resolution in this good cause, he gave one which was indeed very remarkable. The king having issued his proclamation, forbidding the use of the Bible in English, and other books on religious subjects, this pious prelate had the courage to oppose it by addressing a bold letter to his majesty. It will be proper to give a particular account of this affair.

For some years great care had been taken by the friends of truth and liberty, in the circulation of religious tracts, some on points of controversy, and others on the corruptions and oppressions of the clergy. Among other publications that were dispersed, was the translation of the New Testament. These books were printed abroad, and sent in great quantities into this country. Loud were the clamours of the beneficed and bigoted ecclesiastics against these malignant and pestiferous writings, as they called them. But, as the government did not interfere, the bishops could only use the authority of the laws then in force, in guarding against these daring invasions of heresy. Episcopal injunctions were published, and every possible care taken to suppress the dangerous innovation. But the laws then in existence did not reach the case: printing and publishing books were new occurrences; and none of the statutes were directly pointed against the seeds of heresy sown in this way. It was, therefore, deemed necessary to obtain something more pointed and explicit from the government.

Among the tracts then dispersed were "The Parable of Wicked Mammon;"—"The Obedience of the Christian Man;"—"The Primer;"—"The Sum of the Scripture;"—and, "The Supplication of the Beggars." The last of these pieces contained a sharp invective against the established clergy, who, by their unprecedented exactions were represented as the chief occasion of all the poverty in the nation. These exposures roused nearly the whole body of the clergy, who made a successful application to the king. His majesty im-

* Gilpin, vol. i. p. 342—346.

mediately issued a severe proclamation against heretical books, commanding that all such books should be delivered up within fifteen days; and empowering the bishops to imprison at pleasure all persons suspected of having them, till they had purged themselves, or abjured. It empowered the bishops to set an arbitrary fine on all persons convicted. It forbade all appeals from ecclesiastical courts; and obliged all civil officers, on oath, to assist the bishops with their utmost endeavours in the extirpation of heresy. Justices were ordered to inquire, at their quarter sessions, into the state of religion through all the counties; and sheriffs were commanded to arrest all suspected persons, and deliver them to the bishops.

The sword thus put into the hands of the bishops was presently unsheathed. The effects of this proclamation were dreadful. It would surprise the good people of England at this day to hear, that many of their forefathers were then burnt for reading the Bible, and teaching their children the ten Commandments and the Lord's prayer in English. These things were then called heresy!

On this occasion Hugh Latimer undertook to address a letter to the king. He had already preached before Henry, and had been noticed by him in a more affable manner than that monarch usually indulged towards his subjects. But whatever evidence the prelate had of the favour of his prince, he was willing to hazard all, rather than omit what appeared to him an indispensable duty. He was generally considered as one of the most eminent among the protestants; therefore he thought it incumbent upon him to be one of the most forward in opposing the oppressions and iniquities of popery.* His letter is the picture of a honest, sincere heart, and is a firm resistance of the encroachments of ecclesiastical despotism; while it contains an eloquent and conclusive defence of Christian liberty, as the universal birthright of man. It will be proper, therefore, to insert the substance of it, as nearly as possible in his own words:

“What is it to be a traitor to the truth, but to be a traitor and a Judas to Christ? Whosoever denieth him before men, him will he deny before his Father in heaven. This denying

* Gilpin, vol. 1. p. 363.

ought more to be dreaded, than the loss of all temporal goods, honour, and promotion, with all manner of torments and cruelties, and death itself, be it ever so shameful and painful. But, alas! how little do men fear the terrible judgment of Almighty God? especially they who boast themselves to be guides and captains to others, and challenge to themselves the knowledge of holy Scripture, yet will neither show the truth themselves, nor suffer them that would. So that may be said of them, which our Saviour Christ said to the Pharisees: ‘Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, nor suffer ye them that would to enter in.’ As much as in them lieth, they debar, not only the word of God, but also by their subtle wiliness they instruct, move, and in a manner provoke all the kings in Christendom to aid and succour them in their mischief; and especially in this your realm, they have so blinded your liege subjects, with their laws, customs, ceremonies, and glosses, and punished them with cursings and other corruptions; and now at last when they see that they cannot prevail against the open truth (which the more it is persecuted, the more it increaseth) they have by their tyranny made it treason against your noble majesty to have the Scripture in English.

“Your high majesty are to me and all your subjects, in God’s stead, to defend and succour us in our *right*; and so I tremble and quake to speak to your grace. But, as you are a mortal man, in danger of sin, having in you the corrupt nature of Adam, in which we are all both conceived and born; so have you no less need of the merits of Christ’s passion for your salvation, than I and other of your subjects, who are all members of the mystical body of Christ. Though you be a higher member, yet you must not disdain the lesser. St. Paul says, ‘Those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour;’ and they are as necessary as the others, for the preservation of the body. This, most gracious king, when I considered, as also your favourable and gentle nature, I was bold to write this rude and simple letter to your grace, trusting you will accept my true and faithful mind.

“I will first exhort your grace to make your own, the life

and actions of our Saviour and his apostles, in preaching and setting forth the Gospel; and to note also the words of our Master Christ, which he said to his disciples when he sent them forth to preach the Gospel, and to these have constantly in your mind the golden rule of Christ: ‘The tree is known by its fruits.’ By the diligent marking of these, your grace will clearly perceive who are the true followers of Christ and teachers of his Gospel, and who are not.

“When Christ sent his disciples to preach the Gospel, he said to them—‘Ye shall be brought before governors and kings, and ye shall be hated of all men, for my name’s sake.’ But he exhorted them by his own example, to take patiently such persecution, saying, ‘The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?’ ‘In the world ye shall have tribulation, and the world shall hate you; but in me ye shall have peace.’ And he said, ‘Lo, I send you forth as sheep among wolves.’ So that the true preachers of God’s word, go like harmless sheep, and are persecuted; yet they revenge not their wrong, but remit all to God: so far are they from persecuting any others, except with the word of God, which is their only weapon. This is the most evident token by which our Saviour would have his Gospel and the preachers of it known, that it is despised by worldly wisemen, that they repute it to be foolishness and deceivable doctrine, and that the true preachers should be persecuted, and driven from city to city, and suffer the loss of goods and life. The holy apostle says, ‘They that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution.’ ‘For unto you it is given, not only to believe on Christ, but also to *suffer* for his sake.’

“May it, therefore, please your highness to return to the golden rule of Christ: ‘By their fruits shall ye know them.’ For where you see persecution, there is the Gospel, and there is the truth; and they who persecute are void of and without all truth; not caring for the clear light, which is come into the world, and which showeth every man’s works. They whose works are corrupt dare not come to this light, but endeavour to stop it and hinder it, preventing to the uttermost the holy Scriptures from being read in our mother tongue,

saying, that it would cause heresy and insurrection ; and so they persuade, or would fain persuade, your grace to keep them back. But, mark their shameless boldness, who are not ashamed, contrary to Christ's doctrine, to gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles, to call light darkness and darkness light, good evil and evil good ; and to affirm, that that which teacheth all obedience, will cause strife and dissention ; but such is their worldly wisdom, by which they judge and measure every thing, that they may hold and keep their wicked mammon, which is their god, and hath so blinded their hearts, that they cannot see the light of the sacred Scripture, though they babble ever so much about it.

“ As to this matter, other men have showed your grace their minds, how necessary it is to have the Scriptures in English. This also your grace hath promised by your last proclamation ; which promise, I pray God that your gracious highness may shortly perform, even this very day. Let not the wickedness of these worldly men detain you from your godly purpose. Therefore, most worthy king, seeing Christ hath sent his servants, his true preachers, and his own word, to comfort our weak and sickly souls, let not these worldly men make your grace believe that they will cause insurrections and heresies, and such mischiefs as they imagine ; lest that be avenged upon you and your realm, as David was upon the Ammonites, and as God hath ever avenged upon them who have obstinately withstood and contradicted his word. Your grace knoweth, that there is no man living, especially that loveth worldly promotion, who is so foolish to set forth, promote, and enhance his enemies, whereby he would be hindered of his worldly pleasures and fleshly desires ; but he will, on the contrary, seek in all possible ways utterly to confound, destroy, and put them out of the way. And as to your last proclamation, prohibiting such books, the true cause of it, and the chief counsellors, were they whose evil living and cloaked hypocrisy these books uttered and disclosed.

“ Though your grace may by other books, and by the Scripture itself, perceive the hypocritical wolves in sheep's clothing, I think myself bound in conscience to utter such things as God hath put into my mind. This I do, God

being my judge ! not of hatred to any person living, nor because I think the word of God would go forth without persecution, if your grace had commanded that every man within your realm should have it in his mother tongue ; for the Gospel must needs have persecution until it be preached throughout all the world ; which, as Christ showed his disciples, is the last sign before the day of judgment ; so that if your grace had commanded that the Scripture should have been put forth, Satan would have set forth some wile or other to persecute the truth.

“ My purpose is, for the love that I have to God and the glory of his name, and for the true allegiance that I owe to your grace, not to hide in the ground the talent which God has given me ; but to employ it for the benefit of others, that it may increase the pleasure of God ; and to exhort your grace to avoid and beware of these mischievous flatterers, and their abominable ways and counsels. Take heed then whose counsels you follow. For there are some, who, through fear of losing their worldly honour and worship, will not relinquish their opinion, which they have rashly defended, to please men by whom they have been promoted ; so that now they think that all their felicity confined to this life, would be spoiled, and their wisdom not so greatly regarded, if that which they have so slanderously oppressed should now be set forth and allowed. Alas ! let these men remember St. Paul, how fervent he was against the truth ; but afterwards he thought it no shame to suffer punishment, and great persecution, for that which he before despised and called heresy.

“ Wherefore they are sorely drowned in worldly wisdom, who think it against their worship to acknowledge their ignorance. I pray to God that your grace may espy and take heed of their worldly wisdom, which is foolishness with God ; that you may do what God commandeth, and not what seemeth good in your own sight ; that your grace may be found acceptable in the sight of God, and one of the *members* of his church ; and that, according to the office to which he hath called you, you may be found a *faithful minister of his gifts*, and *not a defender of his faith*. For he will not have it defended by man or man’s power, but by his *word only*, by which he hath evermore defended it, and in a way *far*

above man's power or reason, as all the stories of the Bible show.

“Most gracious majesty, remember yourself. Have pity upon your own soul; and think that the day is even at hand when you shall give account of your office, and of the blood that hath been shed with your sword. In which day, that your grace may stand steadfast, and not be ashamed, but be clear and ready in your reckoning, and have your peace sealed with the blood of Christ, which alone can serve on that day, is my daily prayer to him who suffered death for our sins, and who also prayeth to his Father to bestow his grace upon us continually. To whom be all honour and praise for ever, amen. The Spirit of God preserve you.”*

With such openness did this true minister of Christ advocate the cause of religious freedom and the rights of Christians; showing his good conscience towards God, his good will to the king, his steadfastness in the truth, his concern for the welfare of the commonwealth, and his tender care of the church of Christ. Though the predominance of the popish party had greater influence than his letter, the king was no way displeased, but received it with great temper and condescension, and was graciously pleased to thank him for his well-intended advice.

The interested and obstinate support, however, which Henry gave to the old system of error and oppression, and his cruel persecution of those who favoured the new opinions, drove his subjects to inquire into the just limits of authority and obedience. Their judgments once informed as to the rights to which they were entitled, and their consciences satisfied respecting the proper means by which they might be acquired, the immense importance of the immediate object in view, even their emancipation from spiritual bondage, together with the salvation of their own souls and the souls of their posterity, impelled them to make the attempt with an enthusiasm and a perseverance which any other object of inferior moment could not have inspired.

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 403.

SECTION II.

*The Rejection of the Papal Yoke, and its Influence on
Christian Freedom.*

THE pope had no where a son more dutiful, or a vassal more devoted, than the king of England. His imperious and savage dispositions carried him to the greatest lengths in cruelty and blood. Even his own family was not exempt. No less than six wives were chained to this barbarous monarch, three of whom he divorced, and two he beheaded. These cruel proceedings were, nevertheless, wisely overruled by divine Providence for much good. Upon an impartial view of these events, we are forcibly reminded, that in the most important changes which have taken place in society, the worst of men have not unfrequently been the unconscious instruments of accomplishing the holy and gracious designs of God. In no instance has this been more conspicuous than in England's open rejection of the papal yoke; wherein so much cruelty was turned to such happy consequences, when king Henry quarrelled with the pope.

The protestant doctrines, spreading with rapidity in Germany and other parts of Europe, had hitherto met with no public countenance in England. The regular clergy, still encroaching more and more, had engrossed one third of the wealth of the nation. The consequence of this immense aggrandizement was the possession of a large share of temporal power; and the gross ignorance of the times established them equally in their spiritual dominion. From the days of Wickliffe, many distinguished persons thought and spoke with a degree of freedom on the prevailing abuses and corruptions in the church: but severe laws, purchased of needy kings, and executed by cruel priests, held these Reformers in constant awe. The inclinations of the people ran strong against the clergy; so that as soon as the opinions of the Reformers were openly announced, they were warmly espoused; and the protestants in many places began to form parties. But in those oppressive times, when kings thought for their subjects, the

private opinions and dispositions of the people were very little consulted, reasons of state prevailed; and Henry still had his motives for holding fair with the court of Rome. But as the darkest moments of the night precede the dawn of day, so when the church appeared in the most desperate situation, her deliverance from worse than Babylonish captivity was approaching. Though the inquisition, with all its terrors, and the slavish submission of the monarchs of Christendom, upheld the pillars of the Romish see, the utter rottenness of the foundation awaited only a bold and resolute hand to make the magnificent fabric totter.

We have already adverted to the extensive diffusion of Wickliffe's excellent principles, through the various nations on the continent of Europe. The immortal seed took deep root in the earth, and watered with the dews of heaven, it could never be destroyed. The malice of Rome and hell were combined in its extinction, but without success. The celebrated John Huss and Jerome of Prague, made a bold and vigorous stand against ecclesiastical usurpation, and in favour of religious emancipation; and though they fell a sacrifice to Romish treachery and domination, the great cause in which they bled, survived their ashes. God raised up others, furnished with equal piety and magnanimity, to defend the rights of conscience, and promote the Redeemer's kingdom; and at length the cause of spiritual melioration gained fresh accessions of strength, and even triumphed over the policy and power of Rome.

The contemplation of the ways of Providence is never more instructive than when we can trace the gradual progress of divine light, as it breaks in upon the minds of honest and assiduous inquirers after truth. The pious Christian will adore the wisdom and goodness of God, in directing the celebrated MARTIN LUTHER into the light and liberty of the Gospel, and fitting him for the work to which he was called. He was endowed with a greatness of soul far beyond the common lot of men; and, through divine grace, was enabled to persevere in a conduct the most consistent, uncorrupt, and disinterested. His bold and adventurous spirit never appears to have made the smallest encroachment on the most perfect integrity; and it is an undoubted fact, that the Saxon Reformer was not in-

duced to act the part, which has given so great a celebrity to his name, from motives of personal malice, or of avarice, or of ambition, but purely from the fear of God, from a conscientious regard to evangelical truth, from a zeal for the divine glory, and from a concern to benefit the souls of his fellow-creatures.*

Luther engaged in open war with the pope, his cardinals, and his bishops; but, on his part, it was entirely a war of reason and argument. From all his numerous or most acrimonious publications, not a single line has been produced where he recommends force or violence, in the smallest degree, to be used against his enemies. He insisted with the utmost precision on this grand distinction—"that errors in articles of faith were not to be suppressed or extirpated by fire and sword, but confuted by the word of God: and that recourse ought never to be had to capital penalties, except in cases of actual sedition and tumult." No wonder, therefore, that the pope considered this heretic as designing "to destroy all authority and order, under the sanction of Christian liberty."†

By nobly daring to claim and exercise, in some degree, the right of free inquiry, when all the powers on earth were combined in its suppression, did Luther and his coadjutors accomplish that reformation in Germany, which eventually drew forth primitive Christianity, long hidden and concealed under innumerable abuses, to the view of an awakened and astonished world. While the king of England was murdering his wisest and best subjects, these servants of the living God, roused by the errors and iniquities of the papacy, began to preach and write publicly against the despotism and blasphemies of the man of sin. Their vigorous efforts made a powerful impression on the minds of the people; and so consonant were the Reformers' principles to truth and soberness, as well as to the just rights and liberties of mankind, that they were eagerly embraced by multitudes, and spread with surprising rapidity through the various nations of Europe. Indeed, so great was the force of *truth* when it once gained attention, even in those superstitious times, that all the arts, and policy,

* Milner, vol. iv. p. 307, 310.

† Ibid. 661, 678, 1098.

and power of Rome, aided throughout Europe by the veneration of antiquity, the prejudices of the vulgar, and the cruelty of princes, were fairly baffled and confounded by the opposition of a few solitary Reformers. These celebrated heroes, among whom, in addition to Luther, we ought to mention Zuinglius, Bullinger, Bucer, Martyr, Gualter, Calvin, and Melancthon, being furnished with a power which seemed almost omnipotent, attacked and shook the throne of antichrist to its very base, and emancipated several of the continental nations from the vassallage of the popedom. England itself eventually shared in these glorious triumphs.

Cardinal Wolsey indeed, though a haughty prelate, first broke the ice, and greatly contributed to the overthrow of the papal power in this country. In the plenitude of his authority, he seized many of the smaller monasteries to build the splendid college of Christ Church, Oxford. Holy church having thus led the way, how could it be expected that the state would hesitate to follow, and lay its profane hands on treasures so tempting? Mortified, too, at missing St. Peter's chair, the cardinal sought to wreak his vengeance on the emperor Charles, to whom he attributed his disappointment. The great cause which now held the attentive nation in suspense, was the king's divorce—a suit the most famous in history. Wolsey exercised great policy, and helped the king's confessor to fill the royal conscience with scruples concerning the legality of his marriage with Catharine of Spain, the emperor's aunt, with whom he had lived almost twenty years. Henry made the most humble and respectful application to the pope to nullify the marriage; but, as the sovereign pontiff was afraid of disobliging the emperor, he artfully contrived delays, which proved extremely uncongenial to the king's violent passions.

This important affair being held in suspense by his holiness, Henry convened the parliament, which passed several laws for the reformation of the intolerable abuses of the clergy, whose iniquitous measures were treated with great freedom and open censure in the debates of the two houses. As might be expected, the clergy loudly complained of these liberties, and clamorously said, that such defamatory proceedings were the usual preludes of *the most dangerous heresies*. But their

bigoted opposition to the liberties and privileges of the church, only increased the popular ardour of the two houses, to accomplish that which all rational men beheld so essential to the honour of their country, the true interest of the church, and the credit of religion. The king, by these prompt measures, was desirous to show the pope what he could and would do, if he continued to trifle with him in the matter of his divorce.*

One of the most wily prelates now held the see of Rome. He had his own interest to secure with the emperor, who was opposed to the divorce; and with the king of England, who impatiently waited for it. These cross circumstances demanded all his subtlety; and he showed himself the master of address. He amused each in his turn, and involved the business in perplexity and delay, that he might have time thoroughly to deliberate before he chose his party. The king fully expected an end of the business in a regular way, which he greatly desired, and was particularly careful in observing all the forms of civility with the pope. The poor protestants in numerous instances felt the effects of his complaisance. He even went so far as to employ his own princely pen against them; and his courtiers used to say he wrote incomparably well. No new laws, indeed, were enacted; but the old penal statutes were revived, and the bishops, in various parts of the kingdom, took an active part in the disgraceful scenes of persecution.†

At this particular juncture, Cranmer was introduced to the court, as a man who could cut the knot, which Rome sought to entangle rather than untie. He, without hesitation, declared to Henry's satisfaction, that the marriage was null by the word of God, and gave advice to consult the most learned universities of Europe, which generally concurred in answering his majesty agreeably to his wishes. Henry having received these favourable and gratifying decisions, immediately rejected Catharine, and married Anne Boleyn. But as soon as the news of his divorce arrived at Rome, the pope declared all the proceedings null and void, and threatened the king with excommunication, unless he, within a limited time, returned to his former wife. Henry upon this sent a courier to

* Custance, p. 122.

† Gilpin, vol. i. p. 352.

Rome, with his submission in due form to the pope ; but the consistory pronounced against him the censures of the church, which they appointed the emperor to execute. This so enraged king Henry, that he resolved to revenge and enrich himself, by renouncing all connexion with Rome, and, in fact, making himself pope of England. During the whole session of the parliament, a bishop was appointed to preach at Paul's cross, and to declare openly to the people, " that the pope had no authority in England." An act was also passed discharging all the people of the land from every kind of dependence upon his holiness. This act was an unspeakable benefit to the nation. It not only delivered our forefathers from the most degrading and intolerable vassallage, under which they had groaned for many centuries ; but also cut off completely the detestable trade of *Indulgences*, by which the nation had been drained of its wealth, and the delusions and iniquities of the people had every where multiplied.* This was a dreadful blow against the unbounded usurpation and despotism of the court of Rome, and an important step towards England's emancipation from spiritual slavery.

The conduct of Henry naturally awakened the wrath of the sovereign pontiff, who styled him a despiser, a scorner, a heretic, a schismatic, a shameless adulterer, a public homicide, a murderer, a church-robber, a rebel, a felon, a criminal, and, therefore, justly to be deposed and expelled from his throne.† The king was not, however intimidated, but proceeded immediately to the adoption of a new and effectual measure, by which he made the clergy feel the power of his supremacy, and convinced them how little regard he meant to pay in future to the authority of the pope. An indictment was, therefore, brought into the king's bench against the *whole clerical body*, for breaking the statutes made in different reigns against provisions or provisors ; and all the clergy were declared out of the king's protection, and liable to all the pains and penalties of a *premunire*. Though they attempted in vain to justify their conduct, Henry expressed his readiness to pardon them on their making an unreserved submission to his authority in *spiritual matters*, and paying an adequate compensation in

* Custance, p. 130.

† Biog. Britan. vol. ii. p. 39.

money. The clergy, dreading the consequences of ineffectual resistance, drew up a petition in convocation, which they presented to the king, whom they styled, THE SUPREME HEAD OF THE CHURCH AND CLERGY OF ENGLAND; and being accompanied with the sum of *one hundred and twenty thousand pounds*, Henry was graciously pleased to pardon them all!* By the exercise of his policy, he also procured this pompous and flattering title to be permanently settled by act of parliament: so that king Henry, by assuming the title of defender of the faith, and supreme head of the church, seized the two most brilliant jewels from the triple crown, and placed them in the English crown. He was a man of violent passions, the most arbitrary principles, and, on account of the power and spirit with which he ruled, was justly characterized “the pope of England.”†

The clause in the memorable act, giving the king the parliamentary supremacy in all ecclesiastical causes, is thus expressed:—“Albeit the king’s majesty justly and rightly is and ought to be the supreme head of the church of England, and so is recognized by the clergy of this realm in their convocation; nevertheless for corroboration and confirmation thereof, and increase of virtue in Christ’s religion within this realm of England, and to repress and extirpate all errors, heresies, and other enormities and abuses; be it enacted by authority of this present parliament, that the king our sovereign lord, his heirs and successors, kings of this realm, shall be taken, accepted, and reputed the only supreme head on earth of the Church of England, and shall have and enjoy annexed and united to the imperial crown of this realm, as well the title and style thereof, as all honours, dignities, pre-eminences, jurisdictions, privileges, authorities, immunities, profits, and commodities, to the said dignity belonging. And that our sovereign lord, his heirs and successors, kings of this realm, shall have full power and authority from time to time, to visit, repress, redress, reform, order, correct, restrain, and amend all such errors, abuses, offences, contempts, and enormities, which by any manner of spiritual authority or jurisdiction may lawfully be reformed, repressed, ordered, redressed, cor-

* Custance, p. 124.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 112, 136, 157.

rected, restrained, or amended, most to the pleasure of Almighty God, the increase of virtue in Christ's religion, and for the conservation of the peace, unity, and tranquillity of this realm; and usage, custom, foreign laws, foreign authority, prescription, or any thing or things, to the contrary notwithstanding."*

The clergy, by this memorable act, became equally dependent on the crown, as they had formerly been on the pope. They were completely crippled and disabled, as they are at this day, from doing any thing publicly in religion, until they receive power, and authority, and instructions from the king as their supreme head. By this act, the king or queen of these realms was constituted the very life and soul, yea, even the author and preserver of the church of England. Bishop Gardiner, a strenuous advocate for this new title, declared, "that the *realm* and the *church* consist of the same persons; and, as the king is the head of the realm, he must, therefore, be the head of the church."† His lordship lived, however, to change his opinion, when he changed his circumstances.

This famous act formed a new era in the annals of religious emancipation; and England having cast off her allegiance and subjection to his holiness, all the people of the land, clergy and laity, were commanded, under the heaviest penalties, to measure their religious faith and practice by royal proclamations and acts of parliament! The act of supremacy no sooner obtained the royal assent, than the king issued his proclamation for the entire abolition of the pope's usurped power and authority in this country. The bishops and clergy, notwithstanding their past firm adherence to the pope, testified their high esteem of his majesty's new character, by taking all the oaths prescribed for that purpose: yea, they were so remarkably enamoured with Henry's official character, formerly *political*, but now metamorphosed and become *spiritual*, that they swore to maintain it even before there was any law to require them!!

Among the persons who made their court to the king, at the expense of the pontiff, by transferring the spiritual supre-

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 275—280.

† Gilpin, vol. ii. p. 29.

macy from his holiness to his majesty, the most forward were bishops Gardiner, Stokesley, Tonstal, and Bonner, soon after made bishop of London; who, not content with arguing and preaching against their old master, wrote with great zeal against the shocking usurpations of the man of sin.* Bonner was at first a zealous favourer of Luther's doctrine, and now a great promoter of king Henry's proceedings. He discovered his zeal for the publication of the Bible in English; and, after his promotion to the see of London, he caused six copies to be set up in St. Paul's cathedral. He, at the same time, took an oath, "never to consent that the bishop of Rome should exercise or have any manner of authority, jurisdiction or power, within this realm, or any other the king's dominions, but that he would resist the same at all times to the utmost of his power; and that from thenceforth he should accept and repute the king's majesty to be the only supreme Head on earth of the church of England; and that to the utmost of his power, he would observe all acts and statutes, made and *to be made*, for the extirpation of the bishop of Rome and his authority, and for the corroboration of the king's supremacy, against all persons whatsoever."† These right reverend gentlemen, assured that it was conducive to their worldly interest, could, without a single scruple of conscience, engage themselves to be the spiritual and faithful servants of the pope of Rome, or of the pope of England.‡ The university of Oxford followed their example, and unanimously agreed, "that the pope had no more power in England, than any other foreign bishop."§

Fisher, bishop of Rochester, however, refused the oath, and, with great zeal, opposed the act of supremacy, remaining firm in his allegiance to his original master. For these active and important services, the pope sent him a cardinal's hat; and when lord Cromwell asked him whether he would accept it, and being answered in the affirmative, he carried the information to the king; who in a violent gust of passion, said, "Yea, is he yet so lusty? Well, let the pope send him a hat when he will: mother of God, he shall then wear it on his shoulders; for I will leave him never a head to set it on."

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 289—293.

† Biog. Britan. vol. ii. p. 403.

‡ Burnet, vol. i. p. 181.

§ Echard, p. 284.

Henry was as good as his word; for he soon after caused the venerable prelate's head to be severed from his body on the scaffold.*

The bishop was not the only sufferer on this occasion. Sir Thomas More, high chancellor of England, suffered on a similar account. This person is extolled for his patience, humility, meekness, piety, and charity;† but, surely these amiable Christian qualities did not appear in his conduct to Mr. Bainham, whom he caused to be tied to a tree in his garden, and to be barbarously whipped, then racked on the wheel, and burnt at the stake.‡ Though he was superstitiously devoted to the interests and passions of the popish clergy, and even assisted them in many of their cruelties; he had formerly cultivated more generous principles, as appears from his “*Utopia*,” in which he borrows the disguise of a romance to declare his mind with unreserved freedom on religion: “*The Utopians*,” says he, “allow liberty of conscience, and force their religion on no body. They hinder none from a sober inquiry into truth, nor use any violence on the score of a different belief.”§

King Henry having totally rejected the authority of Rome, his holiness published his fulminations, asserting his authority over all the kings of the world; and having enumerated Henry's crimes, he commanded him to appear within ninety days at Rome; and upon his refusal, he declared him to have forfeited his crown. The sovereign pontiff put the whole kingdom under an interdict; and absolved all his majesty's subjects from their allegiance, declaring the king and his accomplices infamous. He commanded all the clergy to quit England within a specified time, except so many as would be requisite for baptizing the children, and giving the sacrament to such as died in penitence. He charged all his majesty's subjects to rise in arms against him, and forbade all to assist him. He absolved all other princes from their treaties with him, and prohibited them from having any intercourse with him. He required all Christians to make war against him;

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 294.

† Wood's *Athenæ*, vol. i. p. 32.

‡ Fox, vol. ii. p. 245.

§ Burnet, vol. i. 355.—*Hist. of Stuarts*, vol. i. p. 88.

and to seize the property and persons of all his subjects, and make slaves of them !!*

The thunders of the vatican, however, had now lost their force. But to prevent the least inconvenience, the king procured all the bishops and clergy to sign a declaration against all ecclesiastical persons who pretended to the power of the sword, or to claim authority over kings; and that all who assumed such power, were subverters of the kingdom of Christ. The prelates signed another declaration, affirming a limitation of the regal, as well as ecclesiastical power; that one was for civil, the other for ecclesiastical purposes; and that princes were subject to the word of God, and bishops ought to be obedient to them.†

It has been already observed, that Henry sought by every means in his power, to suppress the English translations of the Scriptures; notwithstanding this, several editions were printed abroad, and being sent over, were eagerly read by the people. Upon the publication of Coverdale's translation of the Bible in 1537, the bishops were extremely clamorous, and complained to the king, that it contained many faults. Henry asked them whether it contained any *heresies*; and their lordships having signified that they had not discovered any, the king replied, "Then, in the name of God, let it go abroad among the people."

The sacred volume was soon after commanded by another royal proclamation, to be set up in all the churches throughout the kingdom, "to the only intent, that all his majesty's loving subjects, minding to read it, might not only consider and perceive the ineffable omnipotent power, promise, justice, mercy, and goodness of Almighty God, but also to learn thereby to observe God's commandments, to obey their sovereign lord, to exercise godly charity, and to use themselves according to their vocations, in a pure and sincere Christian life, without murmuring." His majesty intended that all his loving subjects should humbly, meekly, and reverently read the Bible for their own edification and amendment of life, according to God's word.‡

This public measure proved a great national benefit. For

* Echard, p. 290.

† Ibid.

‡ Burnet, vol. i. Rec. p. 250.

multitudes flocked to the churches to read, and to hear the word of God in their native tongue ; the happy result of which was soon extremely apparent, by a detection of the frauds, and errors, and superstitions of popery. The people being excited to think and examine for themselves, many of whom having obtained a true knowledge of the mind and will of God, met with great opposition from the contrary party. They raised their clamour and outcry against this use of the sacred volume, and sought to have it suppressed. No event could have transpired more galling to the catholics, which they clearly saw would effectually destroy their projects ; and, as it was promoted by the highest authority, they dare not openly declare their opposition.*

The king, however, did not stop here ; but adopted another most prompt measure. Not long after the foregoing grant of liberty to read the Bible in the churches, Henry issued another proclamation, allowing *all his subjects* to procure and read the holy Scriptures in their *own houses*. This instrument sets forth, that the king was desirous of his subjects' improvement in the knowledge of their duty to God and the king. That the most likely means of attaining this end, was to allow them the free use of the Bible in their mother tongue. And that because different translations might occasion dispute and error, especially among people of obstinate and presuming tempers ; therefore lord Cromwell was ordered to take care that no person, without his authority, should print any Bible in the English tongue, during the space of five years.†

This was a memorable epocha in the history of religious freedom. It was in the year 1539, when the key of knowledge was for the *first* time unreservedly committed into the hands of the people ; and when the *Magna Charta* of the church of God, was first allowed to be published in a language which they understood. On this occasion the only standard of religious truth, and of the rights of conscience, was entrusted to those to whom it unalienably belonged, and for whose use and improvement it was given by their Creator. This was a tremendous blow against the Romish superstitions and usurpations, and opened a wide door for investigation and free

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 303, 314.

† Collier, vol. ii. p. 150, 174.

inquiry. Men, taught by the Bible, now ventured to think and judge for themselves, and to harbour doubts and suspicions of existing ecclesiastical impositions. It was now deemed consistent with man's rational nature to bring the lofty claims of the church, with all its doctrines and dogmas, to the test of examination, and to reject those which were unsupported by truth, or hostile to the word of God.

We have already remarked, that the seeds of the reformation had been plentifully sown by the zeal and boldness of Wickliffe; and that, notwithstanding all the attempts to suppress his opinions for several successive generations, they spread and prevailed among all ranks of people. Many of the clergy embraced them, and were generally known by their open disparagement of existing superstitions. Wickliffe, in the preface to his translation of the Bible, had so exposed the corruptions of the clergy; condemned the worship of saints and images; denied the corporeal presence of Christ in the sacrament; and recommended the study of the holy Scriptures to the people, that they began to think and examine for themselves. In proportion as the popish clergy resisted this laudable propensity, they rendered themselves the objects of popular jealousy and contempt. The primitive church knew nothing of capital punishment for the sin of heresy; and the sacred Scriptures are totally repugnant to such unprofitable and barbarous proceedings.

Others of the clergy were greatly alarmed at the progress of the *new* doctrines, as they were called by those who rested in outward ceremonies and formalities of religion. They who have not experienced its *power*, by changing the disposition and habits of the mind, have in every age raised a clamorous outcry against those who have been truly zealous for vital and personal godliness. Strange as it may appear *now*, all who then taught the people the Lord's prayer, the creed, and the ten commandments in the vulgar tongue, were considered as fanatics, and enthusiasts, and even heretics, deserving no mercy! But the writings of Wickliffe had existed a hundred and fifty years; whilst the cruel proceedings of the higher orders of clergy convinced the people of the weakness and wickedness of their cause, and attached them more firmly to

those principles which bring glory to God, and peace and good-will to men.*

The pope, after some time, renewed his attempt to prevail on king Henry to be reconciled to the holy see; but his majesty was so exceedingly pleased with his new ecclesiastical powers and titles, that he effected the total extinction of the papal authority in England.† Though he had already renounced, in the most public and explicit manner, all subjection and obedience to the Roman pontiff; yet an event now transpired which put Henry to a second trial. The pope beholding his usurped empire invaded, and his tyrannical authority rejected, by several European princes, thought it high time to bestir himself; therefore his holiness, to recover as far as possible what he had lost, and to provide a remedy against future dangers, appointed a general council at Mantua in Italy, requiring all the princes in Christendom to attend or send their ambassadors, with a view “to suppress heresies, to restore the church, and to make war against the Turk.” The king had on this occasion the best opportunity of displaying what he called his *protestant principles*, and of showing his determined hostility against the supremacy and usurpations of Rome; which he did not fail to embrace, by publishing a most noble protestation “in the name of the king, the council and clergy of England,” containing an intrepid refusal to observe the orders of his holiness. The substance of it is here recited.

“We have been so long acquainted with Romish subtleties and popish deceits, that we easily judged the bishop of Rome to intend an assembly of his adherents, and men sworn to think all his lusts to be laws; and we were not deceived. What king is not summoned by a proud minister and servant of kings, to bolster up errors, frauds, deceits and untruths, and to set forth this feigned general council? For, who will not think that Paul the bishop of Rome attempts to make men believe that he pretends a general council, rather than that he desires one indeed? Who can less desire it, than they who despair of their cause, except they be judges, and give sentence themselves against their adversaries? We, who very sorely against our will at any time leave off the procurement of the

* Custance, p. 98, 100.

† Ibid. p. 155.

realm, neither need to come ourselves, nor to send procurators, nor yet to make our excuse for the omission of both. For, who can accuse us, when we come not at his call, who hath no authority to call us?

“ Let it be granted, however, that he may call us, and that he has authority so to do; yet cannot all men see, what it will avail to come to this council where we shall have no place, except we be known to oppress truth, and to establish errors? Do not all men perceive as well as we, with what integrity, fidelity and religion, these men discuss matters in controversy? Is it not plain what fruit the commonwealths of Christendom may look for at Mantua, the place chosen to keep this council? Is there any prince not being of Italy; yea, is there any prince of Italy, dissenting from the pope, who dares come to this assembly? If there come none who dare speak for oppressed truth, none who will venture his life for it, while the bishop of Rome is sole judge, the defenders of papacy will again set up the popish authority, which is now quaking and ready to fall.

“ Is this the way to help things afflicted? to redress troubled religion? to raise up oppressed truth? Shall men thus know, whether the Roman bishops ought to be pastors in their own dioceses, and so to use no other power; or that they may make laws not only to other bishops, but also to kings and emperors? Oh boldness! meet to be beaten down by force, and not to be refuted by arguments! Can either Paul that now lordeth, or any of his servants, earnestly attempt to heal the sicknesses, to take away the errors, and to pluck down the abuses now in the church, by such councils as that now proposed?

“ Is it very likely, that those who prowl for nothing but profit, will right gladly pull down all such things as their forefathers set up, only for the increase of money? As their forefathers, when their honour, power and primacy were called in question, would, in despite of God’s law, maintain their dignity, or rather their intolerable pride; is it likely that they will not tread in their steps, and make new corrupt canons, whereby they may defend old evil decrees? Howbeit, what need we to care, either what they have done, or what they intend to do, for as much as England hath taken her leave of popish crafts *for ever*, never more to be deluded with them? Roman bishops

have nothing to do with English people: the one doth not traffic with the other; at least, though they will have to do with us, we will have none of their merchandise—none of their stuff. We will receive them of our council no more. We have sought our hurt, and bought our loss a great while too long. Their decrees, touching things set up or put down, shall have none other place with us, than have the decrees of all other bishops: if we like them, we admit them; if we do not, we refuse them.

“ But, lest men should think us to follow our senses too much, and that we, from no just causes, forsake the authority, decrees, censures and councils of popery, we thought it best here to show our mind to the whole world. Wherefore we protest before God and all men, that we embrace, profess, and ever will so do, the right and holy doctrine of Christ. All the articles of his faith, are so dear to us, that we should much sooner stand in jeopardy of our realm, than to see any point of Christ's religion in jeopardy with us. We protest that we never went from the unity of his faith, neither will we depart from it: no, we will much sooner lose our lives, than any article of our belief shall decay in England.

“ We would have a council; we desire it; yea, we crave nothing so oft of God, as that we may have one: yet we will that it be such as Christian men ought to have; frank and free, where *every man without fear* may speak his mind. We desire it may be a holy council, where every man may endeavour to set up godliness, and not apply all their study in oppressing the truth. We will that it be kept at such time and in such place, that every man seeking the glory of God may be present, and frankly declare his mind. For when a council is general no man dissenting from the bishop of Rome is compelled to be from it; and they who are present are not hindered from boldly speaking what they think. Who would not gladly come to such a council, except the pope, his cardinals and bishops? On the other hand, who would be so foolish as to allow the pope to be president, and judge, and to reign in such council, when the chief point to be handled is the pope's own cause, power, and primacy?

“ The world is not now under some slight suspicion, that you intend no reformation of errors; but every man sees before

his eyes your deceits, your wicked minds, your immortal hatred against the truth. Every man sees how many miserable tragedies your pretence of unity and concord hath brought into Christendom. They see your fair face of peace hath served sedition, and troubled almost all Christian realms. They see you never oppose religion more, than when you would seem most to defend it. They are sorry to see that you have a long season spent all your strength in defence of deceits; have employed your whole power in promoting pride and ungodliness; made virtue to serve vices; holiness to be a slave to hypocrisy; prudence to subtlety; justice to tyranny. They are glad that the Scripture now fighteth for itself, and not against itself. They are glad that God is not compelled to be against God: Christ against Christ. They are glad that subtlety hath at this time done no more hurt to religion, than constancy now doth good to the truth. They see the marks that you have shot at in all your past councils, to be lucre and gain. They see you sought your profit, though it were joined with the slaughter of the truth. They see you would sooner have injury done to the Gospel, than that your authority, or rather your arrogant impudency, should in any point be diminished.

“ We will now turn our oration to such things as privately touch both us king Henry the Eighth, and all Englishmen. Is it unknown to any man what mind Paul the bishop of Rome beareth to us, king Henry the Eighth, to us his nobility, to us his grace's bishops, and to us all his grace's subjects, for pulling down his usurped power, and proud primacy; for expelling his usurped jurisdiction; and for the deliverance of our realm from his grievous bondage and plunder? Who seeth him not inflamed with hatred against us, and the flame to be much greater than he can now keep in? He is an open enemy; he dissembleth no longer, provoking all men, by all the means that he can, to endanger us and our country. These three years he hath been occupied in no one thing so much, as how he might stir up the commons of England, corrupting some with money, and some with dignities. We let pass the letters he hath written to Christian princes, and with how much fervent study he hath exhorted them to set upon us. The good vicar of Christ sheweth by his works, how he understandeth

the words of Christ. He thinks he plays Christ's part well, when he can say as Christ did : ' I am not come to send peace on earth, but a sword.' Not such a sword as Christ would have his cause armed with ; but such as cruel man-killers abuse in the slaughter of their neighbours.

" They are afraid, because we justly rejected their primacy, that other princes will do the same ; and so shake from off their shoulders the heavy burdens they have so long borne, contrary to the Scriptures, all reason and justice. They are sorry to see the way stopped, that now their tyranny, avarice and pride, can have no passage to England, which were wont to walk, triumph, and trouble all men. They can scarcely suffer the licenses to spoil our citizens, given them by our forefathers, to be taken from them. They think it unlawful, that we require things lawful of them who would be under no laws. They think we do them wrong, because we will not suffer them any longer to do us wrong. They see their merchandise is banished and forbidden. They see we will buy no longer chalk for cheese. They see they have lost a fair fleece, and are exceedingly sorry that they can despatch no more pardons, dispensations, *totquots*, with the rest of their trumpery : England is no more a babe.

" Surely, except God take away our right wits, not only shall his authority be driven out for ever, but his name shall soon be forgotten in England. We will from henceforth ask counsel of him and his, when we wish to be deceived ; when we covet to be in an error ; when we desire to offend God, truth, and honesty. If a man may guess of the whole work by the foundation, where deceit begins the work, can any other than deceit be built upon this foundation ? What can you look for in this Mantua council, except the oppression of truth and religion ? The bishops of Rome can, when they please, yield some part of their pretended right. They are content that some of their decrees, some of their errors and abuses may be reprehended ; but they are never more to be feared, than when they show themselves most gentle. For if they grant a few, they ask many ; if they leave a little, they will secure a great deal. A man can scarcely tell how to conduct himself, so as to receive no hurt from them, even when they bless him : they seldom do good, but with an intent to do

evil. Certainly whosoever may come to their shops of deceit and fraud, we will lose no part of our right by coming at his call who ought to be called, and not to call. We will neither come to Mantua, nor send thither upon this business.”*

This interesting document exhibits the most intrepid resistance and renunciation of the papal usurpation, and stands on record as one of the noblest efforts of man, claiming absolute exemption from papal despotism. If Henry had displayed similar magnanimity in the cause of universal emancipation, by the guarantee of unrestricted religious liberty to all his loving subjects, his principles and his practice would have been admired and applauded to the end of the world. His conduct, however, on this occasion and some others, inspired the Reformers, at home and abroad, with the liveliest hope, and the strongest confidence. The king wrote a letter with his own hand to dean Basnet, and the rest of the privy council; “showing them the necessity of providing good and faithful pastors to instruct the people in the duties of religion, and in obedience to those new laws which every day restored to them more and more of their Christian liberty, and promoted trade and industry through the whole kingdom.”†

The assembly of the first reformed convocation could not fail of making the most favourable impressions. On this important occasion, lord Cromwell, his majesty’s secretary, sat in state above the bishops, as the king’s vicegerent in all spiritual matters;‡ and, by order of the king, declared, That it was his majesty’s pleasure, that the rites and ceremonies of the church should be reformed by the *rules of Scripture*, and that nothing should be maintained which did not rest on that authority; for, he added, that it was absurd, since the Scriptures were acknowledged to contain the *laws of religion*, that recourse should be had to the glosses or decrees of popes, rather than to them.§ The better part of the nation rejoiced to see the word of God professedly made the only criterion of faith and worship, totally excluding the authority of human traditions.

Had the Reformers of the church of England constantly adhered to this divine principle, their generous efforts would

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 310—312.

† Biog. Britan. vol. i. p. 673.

‡ Fuller, b. v. p. 207.

§ Burnet, vol. i. p. 214.

have gained the greater esteem of posterity, while the English reformation would have rested on its only proper and secure foundation. By strictly adhering to the holy Scriptures, as the only unadulterated and all-sufficient standard in things sacred, to the exclusion of the traditions and impositions of men, almost innumerable evils would have been prevented ; and the rights of conscience would have been placed on their only secure basis ; while the church itself would have presented a less distorted picture, and a greater resemblance to those churches, whose constitution and government are delineated in the New Testament.

The foregoing detail contains a very honourable testimony of king Henry's professed regard for the inspired writings, and of his concern for his subjects to make a suitable use and improvement of them for their individual benefit. Though most of the bishops and clergy were outwardly submissive to his majesty's will, in the various alterations now adopted ; yet they used every artifice in their power to prevent them extending so far as to render the breach with Rome irreparable. With these views, even after they had been brought to own the royal supremacy, they still endeavoured to cherish in the king a regard for the most absurd doctrines of the papal church. And lest the few steps which the king had taken towards a reformation, should encourage the followers of Luther to be more open in promulgating their opinions, they used their crafty policy to make the king discourage them ; therefore persecution never raged with greater violence and injustice, than under this reforming monarch. So that whatever merit was due to the reformation of this period, the clergy as a body had no pretence to any part of it ; and those who actually laboured to bring it about, of whom Cranmer was at the head, were a very inconsiderable number in comparison of the whole body.

Henry, however, had new thoughts on religion, which he presently ventured, without hesitation, to make known to his subjects. It very soon appeared, that no great dependence was to be placed on the political maxims, the religious opinions, or the spiritual supremacy, of this imperious monarch ; for, notwithstanding his most open and determined rejection of the papal power, he made himself equally despotic over the pro-

perty and the souls of his subjects. Henry presented the world with a very striking instance, that the authority of man, which is always fallible, ever variable, and oftentimes sick of its own exertions, is totally unable to establish the unchangeable religion of the Bible; and that when that religion is at all established in the hearts of men, it is established on the ground of its own evidence, and not by any human interference or authority whatever.

The first measures pursued by his majesty, were the suppression of the English translation of the Scriptures, and the appointment of a new standard of faith for all the nation. Archbishop Cranmer had for a long time endeavoured to persuade the king, that, since he had rejected the pope's authority, it was extremely improper to allow the popish doctrines to be taught, which were founded only on the decrees of popes, when the learned primate offered to prove what he recommended; therefore he pressed the king to a free and impartial examination of the received doctrines, that, upon a just exposure of their untruth, the people might not be compelled to believe them. But Henry's infatuation knew no bounds. He not only suppressed the translation of the Bible, as highly prejudicial to his subjects, and set aside such of the popish doctrines as he thought proper; but he "took much pains to promote a union among all his subjects in matters of religion, for preventing the further progress of heresy, and appointed many of the bishops and learned divines to declare the principal articles of the Christian's belief, together with the ceremonies, and the way of God's service to be observed."* Upon the consultation of the king's ecclesiastical counsellors, his majesty framed his ten articles of faith into an act of parliament, commanding all his loving subjects to *believe* them.

This act set forth "That many ignorant and seditious people had abused the liberty granted them for reading the Bible; and that great diversity of opinions, animosities, tumults, and schisms had been occasioned by perverting the sense of Scripture." To reclaim the people, therefore, from these enormities, it was enacted, "That a certain form of orthodox doctrine, consonant to the inspired writings, and the doctrine of

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 173, 282.

the catholic and apostolic church, shall be set forth as the standard of belief; and that Tindal's false translations of the Old and New Testament, and all other books touching religion in the English tongue, contrary to these articles of faith, shall be suppressed, and forbidden to be read in any of the king's dominions." All printers and booksellers were prohibited printing or vending any of the said books. The exposure of the doctrine established, in plays or ballads, was forbidden under heavy forfeitures and imprisonment. All books impugning the holy sacrament of the altar, or maintaining the damnable opinions of the anabaptists, were prohibited under forfeitures and fines. The *reading of the Bible* was prohibited to all under the degree of *gentlemen*. It was then enacted, "That it shall be lawful for all persons to read or teach all such doctrine, as is or *shall be set forth* by his majesty. But if any spiritual person shall preach or maintain any thing contrary to these doctrines, he shall recant for his first offence, abjure and bear a fagot for the second, and, upon a further relapse, he shall be adjudged a heretic, forfeit all his goods and chattels, and suffer the pains of burning!"*

This antichristian enactment was as glaringly absurd, as it was tyrannically oppressive. Had all king Henry's subjects, under those whom he styled *gentlemen*, no souls to be saved? or had they and their families no need of religious instruction? Were lords and gentlemen the only persons in the nation capable of reading and understanding the Bible, or of enjoying the blessings which it contains? But this was not the most glaring and hateful of this monarch's absurdities. For, while he opposed, to the utmost of his power, the ecclesiastical domination and pretended infallibility of Rome, he arrogantly assumed to himself the sovereign power of controlling the understandings and consciences of his people, and of setting up a standard of Christian faith for all the subjects in the land, requiring their belief of his new creed, under the penalties of heavy fines, imprisonment, or death!! His majesty thus indirectly put out the eyes of all the people, and compelled them, or attempted to compel them, to use the royal vision in all their attempts to distinguish truth and error, and in believing

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 369.—Collier, vol. ii. p. 188.

the will of God. Though the new head of the church constantly expressed his wishes, and published his commands for uniformity of religion, he unfortunately thought it far from necessary to establish any such uniformity in his own mind; but whilst he demanded, under the severest penalties, the implicit faith of all his subjects, he was constantly changing his own opinions in religion.

It may not be improper to inquire, what was the result of these despotic and absurd proceedings? It would have been very remarkable, if all king Henry's subjects, including bishops, clergy and common people, had possessed understandings of exactly the same dimensions with their prince, and believed on all points of religion exactly as he believed, and practised whatsoever he enjoined. This, however, was not the case. There were some honest men, bishops and others, even in the dark and superstitious reign of Henry VIII.; who, constrained to think and believe for themselves, could not be compelled to measure their faith by his majesty's standard, or "fall down and worship the image which the king had set up." The conduct of these persons, was extremely offensive to the infatuated monarch; and, in a gust of passion, he commanded them to be suppressed. This is manifest from his letter to his bishops, in which he reprimands them severely for not reading the articles, and for speaking against some of the ecclesiastical ceremonies, sternly requiring them and all others to be more obedient in future.*

King Henry made, indeed, as little use of his own judgment, as any man ever did. He had no fixed principles; and he wished to make all his subjects like himself. The whole of his reign was one continued rotation of violent passions. He was a mere machine in the hands of his ministers; and his passions were borne away by him who had the most artful address.

Gardiner, bishop of Winchester, returned about this time from Germany, having successfully negotiated certain commissions, about which the king was greatly concerned. This raised his reputation at court; where, with his usual sagacity, he observed the temper and situation of men and things; and

* Collier, vol. ii. Rec. p. 31.

finding that there was room to infuse new counsels by the death of the queen, who exceedingly favoured the protestant interest, he employed all the art and subtlety he could collect, and besetting the unsuspecting king, he infused his designs under the semblance of state policy. The crafty prelate had entered into a secret treaty with the pope, and, for expected favours, engaged to introduce popery again into England.

With this great object in view, he took frequent occasions of alarming the king with apprehensions of foreign and domestic danger. He insinuated, that something should be done to counteract these threatening dangers; and, for this purpose, he recommended his majesty to renew his zeal for the old religion. As to his throwing off the papal yoke, he said, it was a noble display of his magnanimity, and was thus esteemed by all men of sober reflection; since the tyranny of the court of Rome had become intolerable. The suppression of monasteries was likewise, in his opinion, perfectly justifiable; and his majesty well knew, that none of his counsellors had been more active in that affair, than himself; but then he thought, that these things ought to be considered only in a political view; and that he apprehended many ill consequences of making any alterations in the established religion. So he advised his majesty to stop where he was, and, by some vigorous act, to show to all the world, that he was not the patron of novel opinions, as he was generally represented. By such a step he would make those only his enemies, who were blind devotees to the papal power, and who did not amount to a fourth part of Christendom.

He could easily calculate what effect these representations would have on the mind of Henry. By these plausible infusions; and by showing how the interests of courts and factions coincided entirely with his scheme, the crafty prelate so wrought upon the vanity and ambition of the king, that by degrees he drew attention; and, at length, made such an impression, as he thought would serve his purpose. Having proceeded thus far, he next proposed expedients; and, as the king was about to call a parliament, he persuaded him to embrace this opportunity of doing something in the business he had recommended. These designs remained undiscovered by the opposite party; for of all the wicked ministers that have infested the

councils of princes, perhaps none was ever more deep and secret than the bishop of Winchester.

The parliament having assembled, Gardiner, now lord chancellor, informed the upper house, that his majesty had, with extreme uneasiness, observed the distracted condition of his subjects in matters of religion; that he had nothing so much at heart, as to establish a uniformity of opinion; and that, therefore, he desired the lords immediately to appoint a committee to examine the several prevailing opinions, and to fix upon certain articles for general agreement. It was the custom of those times, to use no ceremony in fixing a standard for men's thoughts and opinions; and to vary that standard with as little ceremony, as new modes of thinking and new opinions prevailed.

In the conclusion, the memorable act of Six Articles passed the two houses, and obtained the royal assent. By this statute the whole body of popery was restored, and incorporated with the civil constitution, as briefly expressed in the following particulars:—"That in the sacrament of the altar, after the consecration, there remaineth no substance of bread and wine, but the natural body and blood of Christ.—That communion in both kinds is not necessary.—That priests, according to the law of God, may not marry.—That vows of chastity ought to be observed.—That private masses ought to be continued.—That auricular confession is expedient and necessary, and ought to be retained in the church."

The pains and penalties of this new statute were tremendous. It enacted that if any person should speak or write against the first article, he should be judged a heretic, and be burnt without abjuration, and forfeit his real and personal estates to the king. If any one preached or disputed against the other articles, he should suffer death as a felon, without benefit of clergy. And if any person spoke or wrote against them, he should suffer imprisonment during the king's pleasure, and forfeit all his goods and chattels to his majesty; but if he offended a second time, he should suffer death as a felon.*

Upon the introduction of this act, the protestants saw plainly

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 259.

enough a concerted scheme, and could trace it, without much difficulty, to its true source. During its progress through the two houses, they resolved to collect all their strength, and, at least make one vigorous struggle. Every one, therefore, employed his utmost energies; but the noble stand made by archbishop Cranmer deserves particularly to be remembered. This learned prelate, to use a military phrase, disputed every inch of ground, and this he did with such force of reason, that if reason had been the weapon of his adversaries, he had carried his point. But all his eloquence and arguments were ineffectual: the affair had been resolved in the cabinet; and the parliament was only consulted for the sake of form. The act, therefore, passed without much opposition; and was guarded with those penalties, which made it dreadful to the better part of the nation.

This act was no sooner published, than it created universal alarm to all the friends of liberty and reformation. The protestants every where exclaimed, “that their prospect of happiness was now over!!” They could not now expect a toleration. They clearly saw, that a sword was put into the hands of their enemies to destroy them. Both papists and protestants joined in exclaiming, “that it was difficult to understand what the king intended; for it was not safe to be the one or the other; seeing the act of supremacy condemned papists, and the act of six articles destroyed protestants.”*

Good bishop Latimer was among those whose holy indignation was first awakened by these proceedings; and, as he could not give his vote for the act, he thought it wrong to hold any office in a church, where these terms of communion were required. He, therefore, resigned his bishopric, and retired into the country. It is further related, that when he returned from the parliament-house to his lodgings, the day on which the act passed, he threw off his robes, and, leaping up, exclaimed to those about him, “that he thought himself lighter than ever he was before.”

As might be expected, vigilant emissaries were sent in every direction; articles of accusation were collected from all quarters; and in London alone, more than five hundred persons

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 370—372.—Gilpin, vol. i. p. 406—415.

were in a very short time cast into prison. Papists and protestants were alternately burnt at the same stake: and, in some instances, the former were hanging and the latter burning at the same time and place, as we find recorded in the annals of Smithfield.*

Lord Cromwell, and archbishop Cranmer, beheld with awful concern the miseries of the nation, but could not prevent them. They stood nearly alone, in opposing these arbitrary measures; while they had enough to do in stemming a torrent, which ran so strong against themselves. Cromwell was afterwards borne down by his enemies; and more than one attempt was made at the life of Cranmer; but the favour of his sovereign sheltered him. Indeed, king Henry's care for this learned prelate to the end of his reign, is almost the only striking instance we have, either of his steadiness, or his good nature.

These barbarous persecutions were accompanied, as might be expected, with contention and discord in every corner of the land. The king himself complained to the parliament, saying, "charity and concord are not among my subjects, but discord and dissension beareth rule in every place. Behold! the one calleth the other heretic and anabaptist; and he calleth him again papist, hypocrite and pharisee. I see and hear daily, that the clergy preach one against another; teach one contrary to another; inveigh one against another, without charity or discretion. Some are too stiff in their old *mumpsimus*; others are too busy and curious in their new *sumpsimus*."†

Henry's disgraceful intolerance was a source of unbounded grief to all his worthy subjects, and produced similar impressions on the minds of the learned Reformers abroad. Luther, Melancthon, and several of the foreign Princes could not help feeling greatly disgusted with the conduct of the infatuated monarch. He for some time, held a friendly correspondence with Melancthon, whom he invited to England; and who, at the solicitation of the Landgrave of Hesse, wrote him a long letter in a most magnanimous spirit, a portion of which deserves quotation.

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 445.—Fuller, b. v. p. 235.

† Fox, vol. ii. p. 482.

“Many pious and learned men in Germany,” says he, “have indulged the hope that your majesty’s authority would have produced a considerable alteration in the conduct of other kings, and that the German princes in particular might have been influenced to relinquish the unworthy cruelty of their proceedings, and deliberate on the correction of abuses. You were hailed as the promoter and leader of this most holy and illustrious design. Now, alas ! your prejudices have wounded our minds most deeply ; the animosity of other princes is confirmed ; the vexatious obstinacy of the impious is increased ; and the ancient errors are strengthened. The bishops no doubt contend that they do not maintain errors, but true doctrines and a divine right ; and though by no means ignorant that they are in fact opposed to the divine authority and the apostolical constitution of the church ; yet men will find out very fine interpretations, or artful poisons, as Euripides calls them, when policy requires it, in order to furnish a specious pretext for their errors. Sophisms of this description may not be so much admired in England ; but they are very much in repute at Rome, where the cardinals, Contaranus, Sadolet, and Pole, are applying a new paint and varnish to old abuses. In Germany these sophisms have depraved the minds of many persons of distinction, and I am not surprised that multitudes are deluded by these fallacies ; and though you are neither deficient in erudition nor in judgment, yet even wise men are sometimes diverted from the truth by specious arguments.

“It cannot be denied that the church of Christ was for a long period veiled in tremendous darkness. Human traditions, the torment of pious minds, were most shamefully introduced to the utter corruption of divine worship. Vows, gifts, vestments, meats, and drinks ; a vain repetition of prayers, indulgences, and the worship of images, with every species of manifest idolatry being instituted for the true service of God, exhibited a striking resemblance between the religion of heathens and of Rome. The real doctrines of repentance and forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus Christ, justification by faith, the distinction of law and Gospel, and the use of the sacraments, were unknown. The keys of authority were given into the hands of the pope, to support his tyranny both in civil and ecclesiastical affairs.

“ The Spirit of God has predicted that in the last times a violent contention would arise between the saints and antichrist, and that antichrist supported by bishops, deceivers, and princes, would oppose the truth and slay the pious. These very things are at this moment transacted. We rejoiced in the separation of your majesty, and hoped that the English church would again flourish ; but, alas ! your bishops still adhere to antichrist in all his idolatries and errors.

“ It is no light offence to set up new kinds of worship and service of God without his Word, and even to defend it. Such presumption God horribly detests, who will be known in his word only. He will have none other religion invented by man’s device ; otherwise all sorts of religions might be approved and allowed. ‘ Lean not,’ saith God, ‘ to thine own wisdom.’ He sent Christ, and commands us to hear *Him*, and not the inventions of subtle and politic men, who apply religion to their own lucre and commodity.”*

The contentions and cruelties at home, and the instructions of the learned abroad, made no impression on the callous heart of king Henry, who now indulged the court prelates in all their cruel purposes. Upon the meeting of parliament soon after, his majesty’s vicegerent, in a speech to the two houses, declared, “ That the king had appointed commissioners to examine the disputed points in religion ; that the articles of faith might be without respect of parties grounded on the word of God ; and that he was very desirous the people should have the knowledge of the truth ; but his majesty was resolved to punish *without mercy*, such as should *presume to prefer their own private opinions* to those which *were or should be established*.”† No honest man possessed of Christian principles, could tamely submit to this absurd, but most profane despotism ; and it was impossible for any man to be obedient, without setting up his majesty’s creed, already made, or even to be made, as the only standard of truth, and thus refusing to exercise his own intellectual powers.

The sentiments of the two houses, if indeed they had any sentiments, exactly accorded, on this occasion, with those of

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 413—417.—Cox’s Melancthon, p. 413—416.

† Hist. of Stuarts, vol. i. p. 117.

the imperious monarch. They passed certain acts which clearly showed, that two branches of the legislature were not only abandoned to a slavish subjection to the third, but that they gave up their judgments and consciences to his majesty's tyrannical pleasure; that they swallowed his absurdities and contradictions as he directed; and that they gave their fullest sanction to all this by a public statute. A great, and wise, and generous prince would have scorned to drive his subjects into such scandalous extremities, contrary to the law of nature and common sense. Thus all Englishmen were required to believe and practise in all religious matters, according to the sovereign will of their prince, even without knowing what creeds or forms of worship he would prescribe. This act, therefore, confirmed in Henry that pretended *infallibility* which he had so recently wrested from the pope.

Towards the close of this reign, another law was made, which enacted, "That recourse must be had to the catholic church for the decision of controversies; and therefore all books of the Old and New Testament in English, of Tindal's translation, or comprising any matter pertaining to the Christian religion, contrary to the doctrine set forth by the king in the Six Articles, shall be abolished; no person shall sing or rhyme contrary to the said doctrine; and no person shall retain any books or writings contrary to the blessed sacrament of the altar, or other books abolished by the king's proclamation. The Bible shall not be read in English in any church. No women, or artificers, apprentices, journeymen, husbandmen, or labourers, shall read the New Testament."*

Had these common people then no souls to save? or, was the salvation of their souls of little or no moment? Were such persons likely to defile the Bible, or in danger of being defiled by the sacred volume? Must princes, then, gravely determine by law, the qualities of the people whose souls they are pleased to destroy, by depriving them altogether of the use of the Scriptures? Such is the glaring nonsense and absurdity, when princes interfere with the religion and salvation of their subjects.

Henry having made himself absolute, did not fail to exer-

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. i. p. 148.

cise his high prerogative. He destroyed multitudes of his most faithful subjects, among whom the names of Mr. Thomas Bilney, Mr. John Frith, Dr. Robert Barnes, and lord Cromwell, will be revered and honoured to the end of time. No prince ever acted more hostile to the rights and liberties of human nature; or more violently persecuted those who could not go to the same lengths of absurdity with himself, and believe all those dogmas which he called religion. This inhuman monarch, who, in cruelty and oppression, outstripped most of his predecessors, was summoned before the tribunal of God, on January 28, 1546, in the fifty-sixth year of his age, and the thirty-eighth of his reign. The pope, during the reign of Henry, lost his authority in England, but popery and spiritual slavery reigned in their most obnoxious forms. Petulance and lust were manifestly at the bottom of his quarrel with the pontiff, and ambition placed him at the head of the church. In this lofty station, he assumed all the airs of a tyrant, while he possessed the cruelty of a savage, and the zeal of an inquisitor, and poured the utmost contempt on those who refused to be the tools of his prerogative. Though he lived in defiance of every law, human and divine, yet the prospect of death brought his crimes to his remembrance, and he bequeathed six hundred pounds a-year to the priests, to say daily mass for his soul !*

In the latter part of this monarch's reign, he became callous to all impressions of tenderness, mercy, and humanity; and he showed himself to be an implacable, vindictive, imperious tyrant, under the pretence and affectation of mighty zeal for religion. The poor Reformers drank so deep of the bitter cup of his cruel bigotry, that it would be difficult, as well as painful, to exhibit to the full view of the reader, all those bloody characters which so much stained his reign.† Notwithstanding all the faults and foibles of Henry, and that his own design at first savoured of nothing less than of religion; yet it pleased God to make him the instrument of letting in the light and liberty of the Gospel upon the nation, and of paving the way to the work of reformation which afterwards followed. The ways of God, as in the instance before us, are a mighty

* Custance, p. 188.

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 231.

deep, not to be fathomed by any created mind ; and, on this occasion, his wisdom and power were marvellously displayed, by raising up to all appearance the most unlikely instrument to accomplish the wonderful designs of providence : “ That God might stain the pride of man, and that such as glory, might glory in the Lord.”

The hope with which king Henry inspired the protestants ended in painful disappointment. He separated from the pope, but not from popery. Though Cranmer enjoyed his favour, and he defended him to the last against the malice of all his enemies, the cause of truth and undefiled religion dared not lift up its head. The iron rod of power, held down every bold spirit, which presumed to dispute the king's supremacy, as it had formerly done those who had disputed the pope's infallibility. It is painful to record the tragedies of Gardiner, Bonner, and others, whose compliance with Henry's caprice, gave them power to persecute unto death, those whose religion was their only crime. The authority of the clergy was, however, greatly reduced ; and the translation and circulation of the Bible, contributed in no small degree to open the eyes of the people.

The number of ministers and people who embraced the evangelical doctrines was far from inconsiderable ; and their fervent zeal was far superior to that of professed Christians in later times. They spent whole nights in reading and hearing the word of God ; and set so high a value on the sacred volume, that before it was allowed to be published, some of these good people would give even a load of hay for a few chapters of the apostolic epistles in English. Our author adds : “ To see their travails, their earnest seeking, their burning zeal, their readings, their watchings, their sweet assemblies, their love and concord, their godly living, their faithful marrying with the faithful, may make us now in these our days to blush for shame.”* England, however, could not be said to have embraced the protestant religion, or to have enjoyed the least degree of religious freedom, since the despotic will of the capricious monarch made whatever alterations he pleased, and sent to the flames, or to the scaffold, those pious Christians who dared openly to controvert his theological decisions.

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 23.

CHAPTER III.

THE REIGN OF KING EDWARD VI.

SECTION I.

*The Basis of the Reformation, with its Influence on
Religious Emancipation.*

DOMINION over conscience was the sin of Christendom. It left no territory in which the principle of freedom might operate. The human mind placed under the yoke of spiritual captivity, unconsciously submitted to its fetters as an act of homage to Jesus Christ. That faith which had overcome the world was enslaved by the man of sin, and a thousand years rolled away before the imposture was generally suspected and openly resisted. England, as the foregoing pages will amply show, was equally debased as other nations. Though during the late reign, many vigorous efforts were made to release the people from the degrading servitude, and to procure deliverance from spiritual captivity; yet, properly speaking, no emancipation from this intolerable slavery was accomplished: all that could be done was a transfer of the ecclesiastical usurpation from one species of despotism to another, being equally repulsive to the light of divine truth, and equally dangerous to the best interests of mankind.

There is no way of accounting for this state of intellectual debasement, but by ascribing it to the extinction of civil and religious liberty, consequent upon the establishment of Christianity by the secular power. The advancement of knowledge is not more closely connected with political liberty, than the spread of the Gospel of Christ is with religious knowledge and religious freedom. The period was now arrived when the bonds of ecclesiastical tyranny were to be loosened; so that literature, and freedom, and religion revived together. It was not without strong reason that the apostle Paul emphatically urged it upon the Corinthians: "Ye are bought

with a price ; be not ye the servants" or slaves "of men." A spirit of slavish subjection to the power of man is so incompatible with the doctrine and spirit of Christianity, that religion must be first perverted, before it can possibly be made the instrument of oppression. "Christianity," remarks bishop Warburton, "naturally inspires the love both of civil and religious liberty ; it raises the desire of being governed by *laws* of our own making, and by the *conscience* which is of God's own giving. Either the foul spirit of tyranny will defile the purity of religion, and introduce the blind submission of the understanding, and slavish compliance of the will in the church ; or else the Spirit of the Lord will overturn the usurpation of an unjust despotic power, and bring into the state, as well as the church, a free and reasonable service."*

The truth and importance of these observations was clearly verified in the history of the Reformation and succeeding events. On the death of Henry VIII., his only son EDWARD VI. succeeded to the English crown. This amiable young prince, only nine years and four months old when he ascended the throne, was, on account of his piety and learning, his acquaintance with the world, and his application to business, justly considered as the wonder of the age. The mind of Edward was not fettered with bigotry and superstition, the great fault of his predecessors ; and was always ready to follow the dictates of truth, in the promotion of sound religion. Under the instructions of archbishop Cranmer and the duke of Somerset, he set himself to promote the reformation and the happiness of his subjects.

Cranmer had willingly done no ill, and privately many good offices for the protestants ; yet, our author adds, "his cowardly compliance hitherto with popery, against his conscience, cannot be excused."† Being now released from the severe restraint under which he had been held by his tyrannical and capricious master, he exerted himself with commendable zeal in the advancement of the reformation. In this great work, he was most cordially supported by a majority of those who governed the kingdom during the

* Conder, p. 603.

† Fuller, b. vii. p. 371.

minority of Edward. The undertaking was, indeed, as extensive, as it was difficult; and in the progress of the work, there was found a great deficiency of ecclesiastical coadjutors. Although most of the bishops externally complied with the alterations introduced by those in authority, they remained attached to the old religion, and not only refused to aid, but even secretly thwarted the endeavours of the primate and his colleagues.

Civil and ecclesiastical tyranny, had been the common faults of Henry and his courtiers. The two evils were so combined, that, at this early period, it was thought difficult or impossible to obtain emancipation from the latter, without throwing off the former; and from arguments which established the people's religious rights, they were erroneously, but almost unavoidably led to disquisitions about their civil privileges. In those kingdoms in which the rulers threw off the Romish yoke, and introduced the reformation by their own authority, the influence was more slow and imperceptible; and in some of them, as in England, the ecclesiastical power was thrown into the regal scale, and thus incorporated with the civil constitution, which proved not the most favourable to Christian liberty. In this country, the papal supremacy was by law actually transferred to the prince; the ecclesiastical establishment was subjected to the civil power, and by that power suffered to remain; and after removing the grosser superstitions, the principal forms of the ancient worship were appointed by those in authority to be retained.

The ecclesiastical affairs of the whole nation being placed in the hands of the civil power, the protector Somerset proceeded without delay to the reformation of the church. He was unwilling that the people should continue in their ignorance and errors, till a parliament could with convenience assemble; therefore, in the meantime, by his own regal power and authority, with the advice of the council, he chose commissioners, and sent them with injunctions into various parts of the kingdom, to root out existing superstitions and corruptions.*

About nine months after his majesty's accession, a parliament was called; when the leaders of the protestant interest

* Fuller, b. vii. p. 372.

hoped that it would accomplish many important alterations, especially in the state of religion. The nation having for a long time groaned under the oppressions of Henry, was now strongly biassed in favour of such alterations. So great a change appeared in the opinions of men since the last parliament of the late king, that no one could have imagined the two assemblies had been composed of the same persons. In every debate the protestants took the lead and obtained a majority; but not without much opposition, particularly from bishops Gardiner, Tonsal, and Bonner. Their lordships placed themselves at the head of the popish party, and opposed the attempts of the court as much as they dared; not indeed directly and openly; for they soon observed the turning of the wind, and, with great dexterity, shifted their sails. They thwarted the means rather than the measures, and conducted their opposition with that plausible dissimulation, which some men can easily assume. Their common language was, "However necessary these alterations might be, they were certainly at this time highly improper—that a minority was not a season for innovations—that it was enough to keep things quiet, till the king came of age—and that abuses might then be inquired into, and remedies applied, with all that authority which the full regal power could give."*

This crafty opposition had very little effect. The protestants now placed on the highest ground, carried for some time every thing their own way. In that age of ignorance and slavish subjection to man, when the general principles of the people were unfixed, it was no difficult matter to persuade those who were incapable of rational inquiry. The convocation, animated by the archbishop, showed the same spirit, while it was digesting matters for the parliament. Many changes in religion were projected, and some carried into execution. The act of the six articles was repealed;—communion in both kinds was allowed:—images were ordered to be removed out of the churches:—the marriage of priests was made legal:—tradition was discredited:—lent was considered as a political institution:—the liturgy was appointed to be new modelled:—an easy catechism to be framed; and the canon law to be reformed.

* Gilpin, vol. i. p. 421.

The ecclesiastical supremacy, formerly wrested from the pope and given to king Henry, was now by the same authority placed upon the head of his son.* All ecclesiastical jurisdiction was accordingly given to the king, with many of the church lands which had not been seized by his royal father. The civil power, therefore, assumed the sovereign direction in all matters of religion, and the sole power and authority in things ecclesiastical: insomuch that the majority of the king's council had the same sovereign power and control in all affairs pertaining to religion and the church of God, as the sovereign impostor of Rome had formerly possessed.

This ecclesiastical supremacy was the same thing when enjoyed by the supreme authority at Rome, that it was afterwards when enjoyed by the supreme authority at Westminster: it was forcibly wrested from the head of the one, and with all the formality of an act of parliament, fixed on the head of the other. While this mighty power remained the sole prerogative of the man of sin, and even after it was rebelliously claimed by Henry, its sole object was to promote popery; but now, under Edward, it was employed to establish protestantism. The highest civil authority, thus invested with ecclesiastical supremacy, directed its proceedings to regulate and new-model the established church. This was the true ground and basis of the English reformation.

By virtue of the royal prerogative, a committee of divines was appointed to draw up a new service book, which afterwards underwent certain alterations. Upon his majesty's appointment of these learned divines to this great work, he issued his royal proclamation; in which he "inhibited all preachers already licensed, and all manner of persons whatsoever, from preaching in open audience or otherwise, to the intent that the whole clergy in the meantime might apply themselves to prayer unto Almighty God, for the better achieving of the same most godly intent and purpose, not doubting that all his loving subjects in the meantime would occupy themselves to God's honour, with due prayer in the church, and patient hearing of the godly homilies, heretofore set forth by his highness' injunctions; and so endeavour

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 10.

themselves, that they might be the more ready with thankful obedience to receive a most quiet, godly, and uniform order, to be had throughout all his said realms and dominions. He, therefore, willed all his loving officers and ministers, as well justices of peace, as mayors, sheriffs, bailiffs, constables, or any other his officers, of what state, degree, or condition soever they were, to be attendant upon this proclamation and commandment, and to see the infringers or breakers thereof *imprisoned*; and his highness or the lord protector's grace, or his majesty's council, to be certified thereof immediately, as they should tender his majesty's pleasure, and answer to the contrary at their peril."*

Unless all the inhabitants of the land had been asleep, some persons, upon the perusal of this proclamation, would unquestionably have complained of persecution, and have concluded it to have been the highest point of authority, thus to condemn the righteous with the wicked, and thus to stop the mouths of all the preachers in England. If the head of the English church had *actually possessed infallibility*, as well as supremacy, he would certainly have been ashamed of assuming so unrighteous and oppressive a power. All this, however, was in perfect consistency with the high claims of the civil authority.

The commissioners having finished their task, and having, it was said, "by the aid of the *Holy Ghost*,"† compiled the new liturgy or book of Common Prayer, his majesty presented it to the inspection and approbation of his two houses of parliament; upon which an act was passed for its permanent establishment, as the form of public service of the church of England. This was the first edition of the book of Common Prayer; and, though it received several alterations at different times, it was much the same as that which is now used in the established church.

The new statute enforced the most rigorous observance of the book, upon all who should officiate in the church, and denounced tremendous penalties against every instance of delinquency. It enacted, "That all ministers in any cathedral or parish churches or other places within his majesty's

* Fuller, b. vii. p. 389, 390.

† Burnet, vol. ii. p. 94.

dominions, shall from and after the day of Pentecost next coming, be bound and use the matins, even song, celebration of the sacraments, and all other common and open prayer, in such order and form as is mentioned in the said book. And it is ordained and enacted by the authority aforesaid, that if any manner of parson, vicar, or any other minister who should say or sing Common Prayer, or minister the sacraments, shall after the said feast of Pentecost next coming, refuse to use the said Common Prayer, or to minister the sacraments in such order and form as they are mentioned and set forth in the said Book; or shall use wilfully and obstinately any other rite, ceremony, order, form, or manner of mass, openly or privily, or matins, even song, administration of the sacraments, or other open prayer than is mentioned or set forth in the said book; or shall preach, declare, or speak any thing in the derogation or depraving of the said Book, or any thing therein contained, and shall be thereof lawfully convicted according to the laws of this realm by a verdict of twelve men, or by his own confession, or by the notorious evidence of the fact, he shall lose and forfeit to the king's highness, his heirs, and successors, for the first offence one whole year's profit of such one of his benefices as it shall please his majesty to assign and appoint; and also for the same offence, he shall suffer imprisonment for the space of six months, without bail or mainprise. But if any such person, after his first conviction, shall offend again, and be thereof lawfully convicted, then he shall for his *second* offence suffer imprisonment for the space of *one whole year*, and shall be deprived, *ipso facto*, for ever of all his spiritual promotions. And if any person shall a *third* time offend, and be thereof lawfully convicted, then he shall for the said third offence suffer imprisonment *during his life!* If any such person so offending have not any benefice or spiritual promotion, that then he shall for his first offence suffer imprisonment for six months, without bail or mainprise; and for the second offence, imprisonment *during his life!*"*

This was the first time that the legislative Prayer-book was established by act of parliament; but, surely, no great degree

* Fox, vol. ii. h. ix. p. 9, 10.

of honour is due to such unhallowed and severe enactment. The prayers, forms of worship, ceremonies, and all the contents of the Book, were derived from the old superstitious, popish service, and part of the committee of divines appointed to draw it up, were zealous and determined catholics; on which accounts it was liable to many imperfections, and it was next to impossible that it should not have been deeply tainted: yet, had it been undoubtedly compiled “by the aid of the Holy Ghost,” and even given by divine *inspiration*, such human enforcements and penalties, would have been highly unjustifiable on every principle of reason, Scripture, and humanity. In this legislative process, we hear nothing of argument, persuasion, toleration, or even conciliation; but all the weapons are the old, persecuting impositions, compulsions, and temporal penalties, without at all allowing the people to think or judge for themselves. Had the liturgy been more perfect than even its most zealous advocates pretended, it could hardly have been supposed that all the people in the land, or even all the clergy, were, in so short a time, so far removed from all the superstitions and errors of popery, or so well instructed in the protestant religion, as to believe, and receive, and practise all and every thing contained in the new Prayer-book: but to force religious opinions and forms of worship upon people against the evidence of their understandings, the convictions of their consciences, or the bias of their prejudices, was the certain way to make them hypocrites. By thus affecting an exact uniformity of religion throughout the nation, and thus employing the power of the civil magistrate and terrific penal statutes to promote it, the zealous Reformers split upon the same rock as their predecessors: they founded religion upon the wisdom and policy of man, not on the truth and power of God.

Had the apostles left either creeds or prayers upon record, those who are so fond of saying every thing in the words of their forefathers, would not have been without excuse; any antiquity short of this is insecure, and ought not to be trusted. Corruptions appeared very early in the church, and it is certain that a liturgy formed no part of its primitive glory; both God and nature teach us to pray in the language of our necessities. If a formulary had been either necessary or expedient, there can be no doubt that the Head of the church would

have provided one—he would not have made antichrist the author of a liturgy, by means of which his church should address him through all generations.* The Bible is always a glorious rallying point for all classes of protestants; but the imposition of human formularies has invariably engendered the most bitter disputings, revilings, and illiberal recriminations.

By the foregoing memorable statute, the legislative authority not only undertook to provide and prescribe prayers for the whole of the nation, and enforce them with the penalties mentioned; but instructed and commanded, under similar penalties, what *rites* and *ceremonies* they should use in the public worship of Almighty God. Had these rites and ceremonies constituted an essential part of divine worship, and been thus prescribed in the word of God, it would certainly have been highly commendable in the legislature to have instructed and persuaded both the clergy and the people to the most careful observance of them: but, as they were acknowledged by all parties to be mere human devices, and only *indifferent*, why were they made *indispensably necessary* to the ministerial function, and the worship of Almighty God? Why were they made thus necessary by such heavy pains and penalties? Who authorized the civil power thus to compel all the officiating clergy in England, and consequently all the people in the land who attended upon divine worship, to approve and observe the traditions of men, in the public worship of God? While this discovers the only basis on which the English reformation was founded, and ascribes the whole to the civil power, we need not inquire whether the reformed church of England was, to all intents and purposes, a parliamentary church, resting wholly, for its original existence and its future continuance, upon the acts of legislature; but we are constrained to acknowledge, that the foregoing proceedings were unsupported by the Gospel, hostile to Christian freedom, and violently opposed to the rights of conscience.

It will not be deemed a sufficient answer to these representations, to affirm, that the ruling powers intended and endeavoured by these proceedings, to destroy the pretended Romish infallibility, her superstitions, errors and heresies, within the

* Legend, p. 285.

British dominions. The good intention of the legislature, and the worthy object proposed, will perhaps never be questioned : but who will thence venture to infer, that the one or the other was a sufficient justification of the means adopted, or the measures pursued ? In every age the foulest reflections have, with too much truth and justice, been cast upon protestantism, on account of the unhallowed measures adopted to promote the protestant cause. “ The violence of intolerant protestantism, had a most ill look after that of persecuting popery.”

What did the event prove, in the case now stated ? Was it found upon trial, that the understandings of all the people in the land, or even all the clergy, approved of these court proceedings ? This will appear from the famous speech of the lord chancellor Rich, addressed to the council, in which he said—“ We are informed that many of you are so negligent and slack herein, that you look through your fingers, rather than diligently see to the execution of the laws and proclamations. If you would, according to your duties, give your diligence and care towards the execution of the same most godly statutes and injunctions, no disobedience, or disorder, or evil would arise in any part of the realm, but it would presently be repressed and reformed. But it is feared, that divers of you not only do not set forth, but rather hinder, so much as lieth in you, his majesty’s proceedings, and are content that disobedience should arise, and that men should repine at the godly orders of his majesty : so that in some shires the people have never heard of divers of his majesty’s proclamations ; or, if they have heard, you are content so to wink at it, and neglect it, that it is all one as though it were never commanded. But if you consider and remember your duties, first to Almighty God, then to the king’s majesty, the wealth of the realm, and the safeguard of yourselves, you must needs see, that except such orders as his majesty hath set forth, and shall hereafter appoint, be kept, the realm cannot be defended, nor the peace of it be preserved ; but, upon the contempt of good and wholesome laws, all disorders and inconveniences will arise, the people will be wild and savage, and no man secure of his own.”*

His majesty, therefore, by the advice of the council address-

* Fox, vol. ii. b. ix. p. 11.

ed letters to all the bishops of the realm, “ for the speedy and diligent redress of these grievances ; willing and commanding them, that they should themselves have a special regard to the due execution of the premises ; also that all others within their jurisdictions should by their good instructions and willing example be the oftener, and with better devotion, moved to use and frequent the same.”*

These zealous efforts proved insufficient to convince catholics of the errors of popery, and to make them approve the new conformity. They could not be persuaded by such arguments to renounce the religion of their ancestors ; in which they had been trained from the earliest infancy, and to embrace all the alterations and innovations which the protestants now endeavoured to force upon them. This was particularly the case with bishop Bonner and bishop Gardiner ; and because they could not bring themselves within the pale of the new ecclesiastical establishment, they were both apprehended and cast into prison. This violent measure may properly be reckoned among the errors of those times. This intolerance, which issued from the crown, was now invested in the council. But in every view, political or religious, it was a harsh, discordant measure ; and extremely unworthy of the liberal cause, which it was intended to serve.

The peculiar state of the reformation, at home and abroad, put archbishop Cranmer on a scheme of uniting all the protestant churches of Europe. They were all united already against the antichristian claims and pretensions of the papacy ; but in no other point were they perfectly harmonious. Their widest differences, however, concerned the sacraments, and the government of the church. On these heads they held their diversified peculiarities with sufficient firmness on all sides.

From these differences of opinion among protestants, and their dissensions upon these great points, the catholic party took great advantage. “ Let the protestants alone,” was the clamorous cry ; “ they will soon quarrel with the same acrimony among themselves, as that which they have already shown towards us : and it will presently appear, that there can be no criterion of religion, or peace in Christendom, but in the bosom of the mother-church.”

* Fox, vol. ii. p. 11.

These sarcastic reproaches awakened the tenderest concern in the breast of the archbishop, and urged him to use his utmost efforts to bring the various discordant branches of protestants into a closer union. "How noble would be the coalition," said he, "if all the members of protestantism should unite in one common mode of church government, and in one confession of faith!" The learned primate does not seem to have inquired whether his object was practicable; and he appears never to have questioned whether it was desirable. The history of the church, and the experience of ages, have reflected much light on this subject.

In the south of France, in Holland, and in Germany, the reformation flourished principally under Calvin, Bullinger, and Melancthon. To these celebrated Reformers Cranmer applied with great importunity; entreating their friendly and zealous co-operation in forwarding the favourite scheme, and proposed their consultations to be holden in England, as a place the most convenient and secure. The good prelate wanted the experience of later times to convince him, that he attempted to accomplish an impossibility. Men were not created with exactly similar intellectual faculties, or with exactly similar powers of thinking. But the archbishop seems to have been unconscious, that when private judgment is allowed to operate, it will of course show itself in different creeds, in different modes of worship, and in different forms of church government; the last of which, when under the direction of the civil power, will invariably take its complexion from the state.

That very little advantage could be expected from the proposed interview, or from the scheme itself, Melancthon's answer ought to have fully convinced him. The learned foreigner applauded, in strong language, the primate's good intentions, and most heartily wished him success: "But," he added, "the model you ought to go upon, is certainly that confession of faith which we signed at Augsburg." Whatever liberal principles that confession might discover, there was certainly no large share of liberality in the imposition of it.

Calvin expected no better success from the archbishop's scheme. He discovered an excellent spirit, but answered in general terms. He professed that he would with cheerfulness cross ten seas to promote the welfare of Christendom, or of the

church of England alone ; but, in the present case, he pleaded his inability ; and committed the whole business into the hands of God.—This Reformer saw deeper into the affair than the archbishop. He not only discovered that it was impracticable ; but most probably thought, with many other learned men, that, if practicable, it was by no means advisable : as different parties would naturally be a check on each other, and would happily tend, by that means, to preserve the church of Christ from that lukewarmness, intolerance, and corruption which the tyranny of the Roman hierarchy had unquestionably introduced, and which another oppressive hierarchy might again introduce. The projected union of protestants was, therefore, relinquished.*

Though the archbishop completely failed to accomplish a universal agreement among protestants, the civil power was resolved to establish an agreement throughout England. Upon the release of the church from the papal servitude, the people began to think for themselves, and ventured to propagate their religious opinions in every direction. This excited considerable jealousy and alarm ; and it was feared that the nation would soon not only be divided into sects and parties, but destroyed by inbred contentions, if some effectual remedy was not speedily applied ! By the deplorable ignorance and fantastic reasoning of those in power, it was concluded, that the peace of society could not be preserved without the imposition of church government and forms of worship upon all the people in the land !

The first step, therefore, that was taken to suppress existing evils, and to promote universal peace, was the adoption of a new religious creed, when the council appointed the archbishop to draw up a confession of faith, and arrange the different subjects under their respective heads. The affair, at this juncture, was extremely delicate. The liberty and right of private judgment was the substantial ground and reason of the late separation from the church of Rome ; so every restraint upon this fundamental article was a direct attack upon the leading principle of the reformation, and an attempt, however unintentional, to overturn both the foundation and the superstructure.

* Gilpin, vol. ii. p. 114.

Placed in this critical situation, Cranmer had a very difficult task before him ; and he ought to have possessed the wisdom of Solomon, or even the intelligence of Gabriel, to have given satisfaction to all parties, or to have avoided undermining the very basis of the reformation, and destroying the rights and liberties of the people, by prescribing and coercing them to believe the proposed national creed.

The primate, according to the high trust reposed in him, at length finished the work, having drawn up the articles in forty-two distinct heads. This new standard of national faith was afterwards published, with this title : “ Articles agreed upon by the Bishops and other learned and godly Men, in the last Convocation at London, in the year of our Lord, 1552 : to root out the discord of Opinions, and establish the Agreement of true Religion.” Though they are said, in the title, to have been agreed upon in the convocation, the fact is, they were never so much as laid before that learned assembly. The king would not trust the convocation with a power to meddle with matters of religion, from the jealousy which he had of the major part of them. It was, therefore, judged more safe for his majesty to rely on the ability and fidelity of a few select confidants, known to be his cordial friends, than to adventure a cause of so much importance to be discussed and decided by a suspicious convocation.*

The articles were never laid before the parliament, any more than before the convocation ; but Cranmer having finished them, presented them to the council, where they received the royal sanction, and derived the force of law. This was, unquestionably, a high act of the supremacy. As soon as this summary of Christian faith was published, subscription was required of all ecclesiastical persons, bishops and others, who officiated, or should hereafter officiate, or enjoy any benefice, in the established church. Such as scrupled to subscribe, for want of a right knowledge of any of the articles, were to be instructed and conferred with by the bishop, allowing them six weeks for deliberation ; and all who finally refused, were to be expelled from the church and all ecclesiastical preferment. This seems to have been the first time that subscription to articles of religion was required by public authority.†

* Fuller, b. vii. p. 421.

† Strype's Eccl. Mem. vol. ii. p. 420.

In the reign of Henry VIII., the legislature claimed and exercised the right of separation from the church of Rome ; and on the accession of Edward, his son, it claimed and exercised the same right, by rejecting many of the Romish corruptions obtruded upon the worship of God : but, upon the publication of the articles of religion, one branch of the legislative body, without even consulting the two others, imposed their doctrines of faith, and required the new subscription, under the foregoing penalties, upon all the bishops and clergy in the nation ! This was certainly a very high stretch of the prerogative. In the dawn of the reformation, when the liberty of private judgment and the rights of conscience were very little understood, such unconstitutional and oppressive measures might easily pass ; but in later times, when the constitution and the rights of Christians began to be appreciated, they would have been deemed insufferable.

A question of great magnitude will here necessarily arise : What effect had these proceedings on the rights and liberties of the people ? In answering this question, fact shall speak for itself. If those by whom the new subscription was devised and imposed, actually possessed authority to require such subscription, and thus to constrain men to believe as they believed, and practise what they enjoined, in all matters of religion, the subjects of whom this subscription was required had no right to refuse obedience, or to hesitate a moment about it : they were bound in this case to believe the doctrines which the civil power commanded, even though ever so contrary to truth, and to practise what they enjoined, though directly contrary to their judgments. There could not possibly exist two contradictory rights, the one destroying the other ; a right on the part of the civil power to impose and command, and a right in the subjects to scruple and refuse obedience. But, on the contrary, if the political magistrate possessed no power or authority whatever to require subscription, the subjects on whom this subscription was imposed might, with justice and propriety, have refused obedience : they were not bound, in this case, to believe what the civil power commanded, or to practise what it enjoined. This statement is unexceptionable.

All true protestants will undoubtedly admit, that the peo-

ple were endowed by their Creator with the powers of thinking and believing for themselves, on all subjects pertaining to faith and salvation; that they were placed under indispensable obligation to employ their intellectual powers on all such subjects; and that, on this grand and fundamental principle, their separation from the popish church was founded. None but ignorant and intolerant Roman catholics will ever refuse to acknowledge this concession. But mark the consequence of acknowledging this first principle of protestantism. Seeing the people were endowed by their Creator with the power of thinking and believing for themselves on all religious subjects, and were under indispensable obligation thus to exercise their noblest faculties; the consequence is inevitable, that the imposition of the forty-two articles was a most glaring infringement on those intellectual rights and powers which were given them from above, and a most flagrant subversion of those obligations which they owed to God. If their Creator endowed them with rational powers, and made them responsible at his awful tribunal, for the use of those powers in attending for themselves to all the concerns of faith and salvation; all imposition and coercion on the part of man, tended, according to the degree of its operation, to set aside the use of their rational faculties, and, at the same time, to annihilate their obligation to God. Thus, by this ecclesiastical subscription, the people were made mere machines, under the direction and control of the civil power. There is, therefore, a manifest discordance in all human attempts to impose articles of faith, with the rights and obligations of Christians; yea, all such attempts are acts of flagrant injustice, committed against the dearest interests and obligations of men, against those interests and obligations which are sacred and inviolable in the sight of God.

It has, indeed, been objected, that as subscription to the articles was a restraint on the clergy only, it was no violation of the rights and liberties of the people; because every church claimed the power of imposing articles upon its own ministers. —This, we conceive, is a dangerous assumption, unsupported by evidence. In order that the objection might contain something like an argument, or the shadow of truth, it ought to have been proved, first, that the clergy were not a part of the

people ; that they did not belong to the community ; or that they were not human beings, but belonged to some inferior race. This being accomplished, it ought next to have been shown by some incontrovertible process, that every church might justly impose articles upon its own ministers. These are the two great points involved in the objection, the proof of each of which is absolutely necessary to make the objection of the least force ; and till they are both established on the most substantial evidence, the objection will be considered as a mere subterfuge—a mere assumption of the point in question.

It will, indeed, be necessary to pay some attention to the two branches of this objection, especially as they are the only two points of any moment opposed to the foregoing representations. A very near and important relation has always been considered as subsisting between officiating ministers and their people. As the former occupy the responsible situation of instructors, guides, examples, shepherds, stewards ; so the latter are placed in circumstances exactly correspondent : and, as the objection admits, that, in the imposition of king Edward's articles, there was some restraint upon the clergy, and consequently some violation of their rights and liberties ; so, on account of the existing relation, the imposition of those articles, with the penalties annexed, had certainly no very remote bearing on the faith, edification, and best interests of the people ; consequently they had some just cause of complaint. Any infringement on the religious rights and liberties of the ministers of Christ, or any attack upon their faith and religious practice, is manifestly an indirect attack upon the rights and benefits of their people. If you rob the shepherd, his flock must suffer.

With respect to every church claiming the right of imposing articles upon its own ministers, it ought to be observed, that such lofty claims gain no authority from the words of divine inspiration ; they obtain no strength from the plainest dictates of reason and common sense. Why should the understandings and consciences of the ministers of Christ, be tied and bound with these fetters—these mere human devices ; especially when they had free access to the holy Scriptures, the only standard of faith and holiness ? Had this subscription

been required of all the people in the land, it would certainly have been a violation of their rights and liberties, and this seems to be implied in the objection; therefore it must necessarily have been a similar violation of those sacred rights, when it was required of an important branch of the community.

We do not mean, however, to insinuate by these remarks, that the civil magistrate beheld the natural and inevitable tendency of these intolerant measures, much less that he intentionally committed these disgraceful enormities. His design no doubt was good and commendable; and perhaps as great progress was made in the reformation, all circumstances considered, as could have been rationally expected at this early period. The nation had just emerged from the midnight darkness of popery, and was just emancipated from the galling yoke of antichrist. Religious liberty, or even a toleration, as might be expected, was very little known in those early times. The minds of the people in general were still overspread with the melancholy gloom of papal ignorance, and the country was actually deluged with Romish superstitions and abominations. To these wide-spreading evils, may be added, that the worthy Reformers, in all their generous attempts, were constantly opposed by a very potent popish party, as well in the cabinet and parliament, as among the higher orders of ecclesiastics and the regular clergy. When the whole of the proceedings are carefully and impartially considered, it appears more wonderful that the work of reformation proceeded so far, than that it was not completed; and this view of the subject undoubtedly affords some extenuation to that antichristian intolerance, and those popish corruptions, which were retained in the church of England.

SECTION II.

A more perfect Reformation intended, but followed by Measures hostile to Christian Liberty.

THE foregoing ecclesiastical requisitions discover the true grounds on which the reformation rested, and clearly show what degree of influence they had in subverting the sacred rights and obligations of Christians. To expose the common

error of those times, however painful, was indispensably necessary. A more comely and gratifying prospect is now before us; and a pleasing view of these great national transactions is highly deserving of careful examination. The morning of the reformation certainly began to dawn upon the nation; and Christianity once more expected to breathe her native air.

The reformation of king Edward was not deemed perfect, even in the estimation of its most zealous friends and promoters. They used their vigorous efforts to advance the great work, and never intended that it should make a stand in its present unfinished state. Many relics of idolatry and other impurities were banished from the church, and a platform of Christian worship more correspondent to the mind of God was erected. The altars in most of the churches were removed, and convenient tables set up in their places. And, as the form of a table was more likely to turn the people from the superstition of the popish mass, and bring them to the right use of the Lord's supper, bishop Ridley, in his primary visitation, exhorted the curates and churchwardens in his diocese, to have it in the form of a table, decently covered.* This was extremely congenial to the principles and wishes of the pious Reformers; who, at this early period, avowed publicly their objections against the new-modelled establishment, and who, almost to a man, vigorously sought a more perfect reformation.

The nation being emancipated from the tyranny and caprice of Henry, men ventured to employ their thoughts on religious subjects, and to make known their opinions to the world. This excited much controversy among the various parties. The disputes upon the state of the reformation, and conformity to the legislative church, were carried into the pulpits. One party declaimed with great warmth against all innovations, while the other preached as warmly against all the superstitions and corruptions derived from the old Romish church; until the court interposed, and put a stop to these public discussions.†

If the Reformers had been left to their own choice, and had not been held back and retarded by a large mass of

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 156.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 195.

popishly affected bishops and clergy, they would most certainly have brought the government and worship of the church of England to a nearer resemblance of the primitive model. For the mass of evidence, in confirmation of this statement, we are in part indebted to the judicious researches of an excellent author, who is deserving of the grateful acknowledgments of all true Christians.* It will be necessary here to favour the reader with a specimen of this accumulated evidence, with some additional particulars, as nearly as possible in the Reformers' own words.

Bishop Hooper informed Bullinger, that "the archbishop of Canterbury, the bishops of Rochester, Ely, St. David's, Lincoln, and Bath, were sincerely bent on advancing the purity of doctrine, agreeing in *all things* with the Helvetic churches." Cranmer expressed his disapprobation of the vain-glorious pomp and titles, which were introduced into the church through the working of the spirit of Diotrephes, and declared his readiness to lay them aside. The title of *bishop* was, indeed, very generally disused, during this reign, and that of *superintendent* substituted in its place. This change of language was vindicated by bishop Poyntet, in answer to a popish writer. Cranmer further declared his opinion formally in writing, that "bishops and priests were at one time, and were not two things, but both *one office* in the beginning of Christ's religion;" with whom several others exactly agreed. The primate said, "In the New Testament he that is appointed a bishop or a priest needeth not consecration by the Scripture, for election or appointment thereto is sufficient." This was the sentiment of the bishop of St. David's; while Latimer and Hooper maintained the identity of bishops and presbyters, by divine institution. And thirteen bishops, with a great number of other dignitaries, subscribed this proposition: "That in the New Testament there is no mention made of any degrees or distinctions in orders, but only deacons or ministers, and priests or bishops."

Cranmer unequivocally declared, "That in the apostles' time, when there were no Christian princes, by whose authority ministers of God's word might be appointed, or sins by

* M'Crie's Life of Knox.

the sword be corrected ; there was then no remedy for the correction of vice, or appointing of ministers, but only the uniform consent of the Christian brethren themselves, to follow the advice and persuasion of such persons whom God had most endowed with the spirit of counsel and wisdom. And, forasmuch as the Christian people had no sword, nor governor amongst them, they were of necessity constrained to take such priests, as either they knew themselves to be meet, or as were commended to them by others, who were so replete with the Spirit of God, with such knowledge in the profession of Christ, such wisdom, such conversation and counsel, that they ought even of conscience to give credit unto them, and to accept such as by them were presented : so sometimes the apostles and others, to whom God had given abundantly of his Spirit, sent or appointed ministers of God's word ; sometimes the people chose such as they thought meet. When any were sent or appointed by the apostles or others, the people of their own *voluntary will* with thanks accepted them ; not for the *supremacy, empire, or dominion*, that the apostles had over them, to command as their princes and masters, but as good people ready to obey the advice of good counsellors, and to accept of that which was necessary to their edification and benefit.*

The primate most ardently recommended the suppression of prebendaries, and among many other things, he said they were “ an estate which St. Paul, reckoning up the degrees and estates allowed in his time, could not find in the church of Christ.” All the protestant bishops and divines in the reign of king Edward, were anxious for the introduction of ecclesiastical discipline. Dr. Cox complained bitterly of the opposition to this measure from the courtiers, and added, that if it was not adopted, “ the kingdom of God would be taken away from them.” Latimer, speaking of the reformation in his facetious style, adds—“ It is yet but a mingle-mangle, and a hotch-potch. I cannot tell what ; partly popery, and partly true religion mingled together. They make mingle-mangle of the Gospel. They can chatter and prate of it ; but when all cometh to all, they joined popery so with it, that they

* Burnet, vol. i. Rec. p. 221, 223, 228.

marred all together.”* This venerable prelate complained very much of the stop put to the reformation, and warmly recommended the necessity of reviving the primitive discipline.† When the house of commons presented an address to the protector, earnestly requesting him to restore Hugh Latimer to the bishopric of Worcester, the good old man absolutely refused, “preferring the honourable employment of an itinerant preacher.”‡

Cranmer and his colleagues were far from being satisfied with the purity of the last Common-prayer Book of king Edward, and he had drawn up one which is said to have been “a hundred times more perfect; but he was matched with such wicked clergy and convocation,” it could not take place.§ He and Ridley intended to procure an act for abolishing the sacerdotal habits; “for they only defended their *lawfulness*, not their *fitness*.” Cox, writing to Bullinger, said—“I think all things in the church ought to be *pure* and *simple*, removed at the greatest distance from the pomps and elements of the world. But in this our church, what can I do in so low a condition?”

From these facts, the reader will clearly discover the spirit, the principles, and the intentions of the learned Reformers, and how very different were their sentiments from those of their successors. Those who had the direction of ecclesiastical affairs in the reign of Edward, thought it most prudent to proceed gradually and slowly, in removing the abuses, and correcting the evils, which had overspread the church; and to indulge the people for a season with many of those external forms to which they had been habituated, that they might draw them more easily from their superstitious notions and practices, and in due time perfect the reformation to the satisfaction of all. The plan was plausible: but the event was very different from what was intended by those who proposed it. This, indeed, was not unforeseen by many of those who wished well to the church of England.

Cranmer, having signified to John Calvin, that he “could do nothing more profitable to the church than to write often

* Gilpin, vol. i. p. 436.

† Burnet, vol. ii. p. 152.

‡ Custance, p. 197.

§ Troubles at Frankford, p. 43.

to the king," the Geneva Reformer wrote to the learned primate, lamenting greatly the procrastination used in England, and expressing his fears, that "a long winter would succeed so many harvests spent in deliberation." Calvin, by the solicitation of the archbishop, also addressed the protector, encouraging him, notwithstanding present obstacles, to press forwards like Hezekiah in the good work of reformation. He recommended a more thorough purgation of impurities, and that the whole ought to rest on the foundation of *Scripture*. And having understood that their reason for not proceeding further was, because the times would not bear it, he signified that this was "doing the work of God by political maxims; which, though they ought to be followed in political matters, yet they ought not in matters which concern the salvation of souls."*

Peter Martyr found the clerical habits extremely offensive, and refused to wear them. "When I was at Oxford," says he, "I would never use those white garments in the choir; and I was perfectly satisfied in what I did." He styled them mere *relics of popery*. He, moreover, declared it as his opinion, that "the innumerable corruptions, infinite abuses, and immense superstitions," retained in the church, "could be reformed only by a simple recurrence to the pure fountain, and unadulterated original principles." The prudential advice, as it was styled, that as few changes as possible should be made, he called, "a device of Satan to render the regress of popery more easy." Gualter said, that such advices, though "according to a carnal judgment full of modesty, and apparently conducive to the maintenance of concord," were to be ascribed to "the public enemy of man's salvation." He then prophetically warned those who suffered abuses to remain and be strengthened in England, that "afterwards they would scarcely be able to eradicate them by all their efforts and struggles." Fuller the historian says, that the English Reformers "permitted ignorant people to retain some fond and foolish customs, that they might remove the most dangerous and destructive superstitions; as mothers, to get children to part with knives, are content to let them play

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 88.

with *rattles*.”* But if mothers suffer their children to play too long with rattles, they will be in danger of not parting with them afterwards, and so continue children all their days.

Martin Bucer, recommending a purer reformation, said, that “as the clerical garments had been abused to superstition, and were likely to become the subject of contention, they ought to have been taken away by law; and ecclesiastical discipline, and a more thorough reformation, set up.” He disapproved of godfathers answering in the child’s name in baptism, and other corruptions in the liturgy. “It cannot be expressed, how bitterly he bewailed, that when the Gospel began to spread in England, a greater regard was not had to discipline and purity of rites, in constituting the churches.” He could never be prevailed upon to wear the surplice; and when he was asked, why he did not wear the *square cap*? he replied, “Because my head is not square.”† He recommended that pluralities and nonresidences might be abolished; and that bishops might not be concerned in secular affairs, but take care of their dioceses, and govern them by the advice of presbyters. The pious king Edward was so exceedingly pleased with Bucer’s advice upon these and multiplied other particulars, that he set himself to write upon a further reformation, and the necessity of church discipline: a plan of his intended improvements in the English church, which he drew up with his own hand, is still on record.‡ The king was desirous of seeing the reformation brought to a greater degree of purity, and he exceedingly laments in his diary, that he could not restore the primitive ecclesiastical discipline according to his heart’s desire, on account of the insufficiency or opposition of the bishops. “Some for papistry,” says he, “some for ignorance, some for their ill name, some for all these, are men unable to execute discipline.”§

Omitting other proofs of king Edward’s good intentions, and of the liberal and honourable principles on which he acted, we need only mention his conduct towards the foreign reformed churches, settled in London under the care of John

* Church Hist. b. vii. p. 375.

† Heylin’s Refor. p. 65.—

Strype’s Parker, Appen. p. 41. ‡ Strype’s Eccl. Mem. vol. ii. p. 341—343.

§ Edward’s Remains, in Burnet, vol. ii. p. 69.

A. Lasco. A. Lasco was a Polish nobleman, who had forsaken his native country, from love to the reformed religion. In early life, he enjoyed the friendship of Erasmus, who had a very high opinion of him. He was offered two bishoprics, one in his native country, and another in Hungary; but he rejected both, and retiring into Friesland, he became pastor of a protestant congregation at Embden. The protestant churches in Lower Germany being scattered, in consequence of the unhappy troubles produced by the *Interim*, he came to England at the pressing invitation of archbishop Cranmer, and was chosen superintendent of the German, French, and Italian congregations erected in London.*

A. Lasco afterwards published an account of the form of government and worship used in these congregations; whence it appears, that the affairs of each congregation were managed by a minister, ruling elders and deacons; and each of these was considered as divinely appointed. A superintendent had the inspection of the different congregations, "who was greater only in respect of his greater trouble and care, not having more authority than the other elders, either as to the ministry of the word and sacraments, or as to the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline, to which he was subject equally with the rest." Imposition of hands was used in the ordination of their ecclesiastical officers. The communicants *sat* at the Lord's table, and A. Lasco proves that this posture is preferable to kneeling. In fine, he says, "We have laid aside all the relics of popery, with its mummeries, and we have studied the greatest possible simplicity in ceremonies."

Notwithstanding these principles and practices, and their disconformity to the church of England, A. Lasco addressed a petition to Sir William Cicel, humbly requesting that these foreign protestants might be favoured with a warrant from his majesty's council, not to be interrupted for withdrawing from the worship of the parish churches, but be allowed to assemble themselves in separate congregations.† The excellent petitioner was held in the highest esteem, and warmly patronized not only by Cranmer, but also by his majesty, who listened to his petition, and granted him letters patent,

* Strype's Cranmer, p. 231—241.

† Lansdowne's MSS. vol. ii. no. 94.

forming him and the other ministers of the foreign congregations into a body corporate. The patent is expressed in these words:—"Edward, &c. We being especially induced, by great and weighty considerations, and particularly considering how much it becomes Christian princes to be animated with love and care of the sacred Gospel of God, and apostolical religion, begun, instituted, and delivered by Christ himself, without which, policy and civil government can neither subsist long, nor maintain their reputation, unless princes and illustrious persons whom God hath appointed for the government of kingdoms, do first of all take care, that *pure* and *uncorrupted religion* be diffused through the whole body of the commonwealth, and that a church instituted in *truly Christian*, and *apostolical doctrines* and *rites*, be preserved: with this intent and purpose, that there may be an uncorrupted interpretation of the holy Gospel, and administration of the sacraments, *according to the word of God*, and *apostolical observance*, by the ministers of the church of the Germans. We command and strictly charge the mayor, &c. that they permit the said superintendent and ministers, freely and quietly, to enjoy, use and exercise their own peculiar ecclesiastical discipline, notwithstanding they do not agree with the rites and ceremonies used in our kingdom."*

But his majesty's ulterior design, by the incorporation of these churches, ought to be particularly noticed. This is explicitly stated by A. Lasco, in the dedication of one of his books, addressed to the king of Poland, in which he says—"When I was called by that king (Edward VI.) and when certain laws of the country stood in the way, so that the public rites of divine worship used under popery *could not immediately* be purged out, which the king himself *desired*; and when I was earnest for the foreign churches, it was at length his pleasure that the public rites of the English churches *should be reformed by degrees*, as far as could be got down by the laws of the country: but that strangers, who were not strictly bound to these laws in this matter, should have churches granted them, in which they should freely regulate all things *wholly accord-*

* Burnet, vol. ii. Rec. p. 202—205.

ing to apostolical doctrine and practice, without any regard to the rites of the country; that *by this means the English churches also might be excited to embrace the apostolical purity*, by the unanimous consent of all the estates of the kingdom. Of this project, the *king himself*, from his great piety, was both the *chief author* and the *defender*. For, although it was almost universally acceptable to the king's council, and the *archbishop of Canterbury promoted it with all his might*, there were not wanting some who took it ill, and would have opposed it, had not his majesty checked them by his authority and by the reasons which he adduced for the design." In the appendix to the same book, he adds: "The care of our church was committed to us chiefly with this view, that in the ministration thereof, we should follow the *rule of the divine word* and *apostolical observance*, rather than any rites of other churches. And in fine, *we were admonished both by the king himself, and his chief nobility*, to use this great liberty granted to us in our ministry, rightly and faithfully; not to please men, but for the glory of God, by promoting the reformation of his worship."*

This contains the clearest proof of his majesty's excellent principles and worthy intentions. But to reflect some additional light on this interesting subject, and to demonstrate that the persons thus tolerated, as well as the prince, were concerned to see a more pure reformation; A. Lasco in one of his dedications to king Edward, addressed his majesty in these words:—"If it please your excellent majesty, you are one of these nursing fathers of the church of God, therefore, blessed be his name; and in this high calling, you have, by God's providence, rescued the ministry of the sacraments out of the popish brothels, and brought it into your own care and keeping. Here then be pleased to set before your eyes the example of a good father, in those things which yet remain to be performed; that is, in providing for the credit of this your reduced daughter" the church, "and so of your whole family, not only in this your flourishing kingdom, but also in the catholic church of Christ whereof you are a citizen, to whom a principal part thereof as an honourable family is committed in trust."

* M'Crie, vol. i. p. 391—395.

The learned Reformer then adds—"This is that which all the godly throughout the Christian world expect from your hand; and that the more earnestly, because they know that God hath enriched you with such excellent gifts, and fixed you in so high a place, almost above all others: even to this very end, that you might remove from the ministry of the sacraments all those popish trinkets, wherewith they have been fearfully profaned; and restore to them again that virgin-like attire, wherewith it was formerly adorned by the King of kings and lawgiver, Christ the Lord in his holy institution. So shall your faith and fidelity be famous throughout the Christian world, and the church of England grow more honourable under your government."*

From this long and circumstantial detail of evidence, though a collection much more ample might have been made, the real principles and intentions of the leading Reformers, are unquestionable. No fact can be more obvious, than that the chief Reformers, with the king at their head, anxiously desired and sought a purer reformation, and consequently more extensive liberty to the church of God. With respect to the king, no fact can be more decisive, than that, in addition to his other rare qualities, he had an unfeigned reverence for the word of God, and a prevailing disposition to comply with its precepts, in preference to custom and established usages; and who showed himself uniformly inclined to give relief to his conscientious subjects, and was sincerely bent on promoting an agreement among all protestants, at home and abroad, by directing their attention to the Christian's only model in ecclesiastical matters. Of his majesty's views and intentions on this head, the reader has beheld the most satisfactory proof. Had his life been protracted, there is every reason to believe that he would have accomplished the correction or removal of those evils in the church of England, which the most steady and enlightened protestants down to the present time have continually lamented. This amiable prince discovered, on this occasion, that excellent Christian spirit, and those liberal and most worthy principles, which reflected signal honour upon his character; and it is extremely mani-

* Fresh Suit, Pref.

fest, from his *actual design* in the foregoing royal indulgence and toleration, that, if his life had been prolonged, he would have procured a larger share of liberty for the church of God.

These early Reformers took their stand on the ground of Scripture alone, and by appealing to the simple and unerring word, as the only and all-sufficient standard of religious truth, they were enabled to demolish the pretended infallibility of the pope, and the senseless dogmas of the schoolmen, which for many generations had been received as oracular; and, in spite of so many prejudices, they gradually prepared the minds of men for receiving correct views of the right of private judgment. The people now began to learn, that the inspired volume, so long locked up by superstitious and interested priests, ought to be open to all; that this volume contained the only rule of faith and worship; and that every attempt to control conscience, was a usurpation of the prerogative of God, and an invasion of the unalienable rights of mankind.

Thus religious liberty, one of the most valuable gifts of God, which ecclesiastical power has always been so eager to restrain or withhold, was asserted, and partially enjoyed. The protestant Reformers, it must be admitted and deplored, did not always understand this principle, and act under its influence; it is nevertheless, the vital principle of the reformation. It was the solemn and distinct admission of this claim, that terminated the contest between the protestants and their oppressors;—that released them from the galling jurisdiction of the sovereign pontiff, and the authority of the hosts of his ecclesiastics;—that established their right to determine for themselves what doctrine, worship, and discipline, appeared most agreeable to the word of God;—and that led them to declare, that all those who persecuted or injured any person, under pretence of religion, were enemies to mankind, invaders of the rights of conscience, and disturbers of the peace of society.

The claim of religious liberty, therefore, was the grand principle upon which the reformation was built, and upon which its patrons and advocates proceeded. It must, indeed, be owned, that they had but partial and indistinct views of the independence of opinion; and while they shook off the haughty pretensions of Rome, they did not reject, as equally anti-scrip-

tural in principle, ALL HUMAN AUTHORITY in religion. Still, however, they gave that mighty impulse to the intellectual and moral world, which is designed to obtain unrestricted freedom from all impositions upon conscience. If the Reformers in the fifteenth century did not act upon this generous principle, they did not go to the fountain head of divine truth, but drank of the stream after it was mixed and polluted with the filth of the world. If this was not the ground of their proceedings, in resisting the usurpations and corruptions of the church of Rome, there is no other principle upon which their conduct can be defended, or their example held up to the applause and imitation of succeeding generations. If implicit obedience to ecclesiastical power, and non-resistance to corrupt, and unscriptural impositions in religion, be the duty of all men, then were the Reformers disobedient and rebellious in resisting the existing authority, and in unmasking the enormities, of the Romish church. As members of her body, and priests of her altars, upon what principle, except that of judging and acting exclusively for themselves, could they lift up against her the arm of hostility, unveil her hypocrisy, and expose her deformity in the face of an indignant, abused, and oppressed world? If the church had a *right* to decree *one* article of faith, or to impose *one* rule or order of worship, it had the same right to impose ten thousand: and of the nature of these articles, as well as the tendency of these orders, she alone was declared to be sole and sovereign judge. It was of no importance how corrupt, or how unscriptural were her commands and injunctions; for they were upon her declaration alone to be received and obeyed as pure, as holy, as catholic! If, therefore, we give up the uncontrolled right of private judgment in matters of religion, if we deny the necessity of a recurrence to the Scriptures, as the sole rule and authority of Christians, we must consider the reformation as a schism, and must brand the Reformers as mistaken, designing, and factious men. We know from history, that this is the light in which this glorious event, and these benefactors of mankind, are held by all the adherents to the see of St. Peter. Every hierarchy, whether papal or protestant, which usurps to itself spiritual dominion and dictation; and by anathemas and penalties, vainly seeks to promote uniformity and obedience, must condemn the princi-

ples of the reformation, must stigmatize, as sectarians and schismatics, those men who lived and died in the great cause of religious truth and liberty. But, thanks be to God, the principle of the reformation is that of the Gospel—the right of inquiry—the duty of examination—what the Lord of Christians bequeathed to his followers, and what, from the sacred word of prophecy, shall in the end triumphantly prevail.

While the Reformers were offended with the absurdities and impieties to which, as members of the Romish church, they were called to afford their sanction, they had no occasion, when awakened to the duty of examination and resistance, to call the attention of mankind to any new or dangerous opinion, to any course which before was unknown and untried, or to any principle of human contrivance and invention; it was only necessary for them to proclaim the indubitable rights of nature, to publish the positive commands of Christ, and to unfold to the eager attention of their fellow-creatures the volume of divine inspiration. For many ages those sacred records had been prohibited from the examination, and carefully concealed from the knowledge of mankind, which in the primitive church were constantly read, and offered to the perusal of all who were desirous to know what was written for their faith, and for their salvation. From the holy magnanimity of the Reformers in renouncing the theological doctrines of popery, as being repugnant to Scripture, to reason, and to the knowledge and practice of the primitive church, with the immediate causes which roused them into action, and the consideration of the extensive consequences of their separation from the church of Rome, we clearly perceive the great principle upon which they acted, upon which their conduct is approved, and upon which they are justly held up to the imitation of succeeding generations.

The blessings derived from the reformation, are incalculable in number, and inestimable in value. From that period, science has unrolled its ample page—sound philosophy has succeeded the jargon of the schools; and instead of the mummeries of monks, or the dreams of superstition, we have the Gospel in its original simplicity, luminous in its discoveries, spiritual in its worship, holy in its principles, heavenly in its consolations, and, in its hopes, blissful and divine. The

melioration of government, and a higher tone of morals in the people ;—freedom of inquiry, a pure Christianity, the unfettered circulation of the holy Scriptures, and a spirit of expanded and active benevolence, are the glorious results of the reformation : since which, the human mind has made higher advances in *one* century, than in the *ten* preceding.

This is one of the most brilliant events recorded in history, in which protestants of every class are deeply interested. How high and urgent are its claims to our grateful remembrance ! The deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt, the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, the entrance of the people into the promised land, the recovery of the sacred books in the reign of Josiah, the reformation which followed, and the restoration from Babylonish captivity, were events which the Jews cherished in devout remembrance, and the memorials of which they handed down to their posterity. The event before us cannot be considered of much less interest than any of these ; and is unquestionably the most signal and blessed era since the first promulgation of Christianity by the apostles—the second dawn of Gospel light—the restoration of pure and undefiled religion ; and it should never be forgotten, that, without that lamp which was rekindled by the reformation, we should at this hour have been sitting in darkness and the shadow of death—the debased and enslaved victims of a sordid and oppressive priesthood, with our understandings hood-winked, and our tongues chained—destitute of those liberties and hopes, which alone give happiness to existence, dignity to life, and glory in the prospect of eternity.

How much are we indebted, under God, to those illustrious men whom he raised up and employed in that great work—a work which entitles them to a celebrity far surpassing the fame of philosophers and statesmen ! How much do we owe to the pious king Edward, who, uniting the fervours of an enlightened saint, with the loveliness of youth, put his shoulders to the work, but was cut off in the bloom of life :—to our immortal Wickliffe ;—to the martyred Tyndale ;—to the learned Cranmer and Ridley ;—to the intrepid Latimer and Hooper—men, who, in circumstances the most trying, laboured with unremitting assiduity to release and circulate the word of God ; men who bled and died in the sacred cause. The

same principles have been transmitted to us; and we are bound, by obligations which we can never make void, to extend and perpetuate them;—they are identified with the Gospel, with the Redeemer's glory, with the progress of his kingdom, and essentially involve the best interests of future generations.

What has now been related must be peculiarly gratifying to every person of a liberal and a pious mind, but especially to all who wish to see the Christian church released from secularity and corruption. In commending the Reformers to the grateful admiration of protestants, we do not mean to pass encomiums upon every part of their conduct, or to applaud their temper and spirit on every occasion. They were men, under the strong influence of party zeal, confident in their own integrity and the goodness of their cause, bold and daring in all their undertakings; and, owing to the rude and unpollished state of society in the fifteenth century, frequently conducted their controversies with a degree of harshness and incivility, disallowed in the present age of knowledge and refinement. From the foregoing relation of auspicious circumstances, we might naturally have expected to have seen the most favourable results and consequences in the church or God; the clergy recommending religion by the soundness of their doctrines, by the gentleness of their manners, and by a behaviour forming a perfect contrast with that which was so much complained of under popish domination. But, alas! upon impartial inquiry, our pleasing hopes and anticipations are disappointed. In the foregoing account, so gratifying to every person accustomed to pious reflection, we have not noticed *all* the characters of the reformation: others, less amiable and less worthy of the admiration of posterity, deserve the clearest investigation. In order, therefore, to present a correct view of this great work, and a *full* character of those who promoted it, the *whole* picture must be exhibited, without one concealed or distorted feature.

We have already seen the erroneous principles on which the Reformers set out, and the dangerous rock on which they split. Their encroachment on the rights and obligations of man, was not merely an error in speculation, but, in numerous instances, unhappily blended with their practice. This disco-

vered the uncomely features in several leading characters of the age. For it is an indubitable fact, that although they professedly rejected the superstitions, usurpations, and oppressions of the papacy, they still retained in their own breasts, one of the worst characters of antichrist—an intolerant and a persecuting spirit. It is not easy to ascertain how far they might have been influenced by the example of their predecessors, or hurried headlong by their erroneous and anticatholic principles, and yet remain unconscious of the aggravated wrongs which they committed. We are willing to make every allowance for the prejudices and superstitions of those early times, as affording some extenuation; yet persecution, whoever are the persecutors, deserves to appear in its own true character, as a useful lesson to mankind.

In this reign, many of the Reformers exceedingly disapproved of the Romish corruptions retained in the English church, and became zealous advocates of nonconformity. They excepted against the clerical vestments, kneeling at the Lord's supper, sponsors and their promises and vows in baptism, the superstitious observance of lent, the oath of canonical obedience, pluralities, and nonresidences, with many other similar impurities. At this early period, there was a powerful and a very considerable party disaffected to the established liturgy.*

Their views and designs appear from those obvious facts already stated; and many of them were particularly desirous of enjoying a larger portion of liberty, as well as purity, in the church of God; for which they experienced not the most friendly usage from some of their reforming brethren. It will be proper to remind the reader of a few instances, the first of which relates to the celebrated John Knox. Towards the close of king Edward's reign, archbishop Cranmer was directed by the council to present this learned divine to the vacant living of All-hallows in the city of London.† This proposal, which originated in the personal favour of the king, was extremely disagreeable to the duke of Northumberland, who, being hostile to the reformation, exerted himself privately to hinder his preferment. The interference of this personage, however, was unnecessary; for Knox declined the living when

* Fuller, b. vii. p. 426.

† Strype's Cranmer, p. 292.

it was offered him; and, on being questioned as to his reasons, he readily acknowledged, that he had not freedom in his mind to accept of a fixed charge, in the present state of the church of England. His refusal, with the reason which he assigned, gave offence, and he was accordingly convened before the privy council, when he underwent an examination. There were present the archbishop of Canterbury, Goodrick, bishop of Ely, and the lord Chancellor, the earls of Bedford, Northampton, and Shrewsbury, the lords Treasurer and Chamberlain, and the two Secretaries. They asked him, Why he had refused the benefice provided for him in London? He answered that he was fully satisfied that he could be more useful in another situation. Being interrogated, If it was his opinion, that no person could lawfully serve in ecclesiastical ministrations, according to the present laws of the realm? He frankly replied, that there were many things in the English church which needed reformation; and, that without this reformation, ministers could not, in his opinion, discharge their office conscientiously in the sight of God: for no minister had authority, according to existing laws, to prevent the unworthy from participating of the sacraments, which was “a chief point of his office.” He was then asked, Whether kneeling at the Lord’s table was not a matter of indifference? He replied, that Christ’s action at the communion was most perfect, and in it no such posture was used; that it was most safe to follow his example; and that kneeling was an *addition* and *invention of men*. On this article, a smart dispute arose between him and some of the council. After long reasoning and much altercation, he was told, that they had not sent for him with any bad design, but were sorry to understand that he was of a judgment contrary to the common order. He said, he was sorry that the common order was contrary to Christ’s institution. They, however, dismissed him with soft words, advising him to use all means for removing the dislike which he had conceived to some of the forms of the church, and to reconcile his mind, if possible, to the idea of communicating according to the established worship.

Scruples which have resisted the force of authority and argument, have often been found to yield to the more powerful influence of lucrative and honourable situations. But whether,

as some have represented, we consider Knox's conduct on this occasion as indicating the poverty of his spirit, or regard it as a proof of true independence of mind, even the prospect of elevation to the episcopal bench could not overcome the repugnance which he felt at a closer connexion with the English church. King Edward, with the concurrence of his council, offered him a bishopric; but he rejected it; and in the reasons which he gave for his refusal, he declared the episcopal office to be in itself destitute of divine authority, and the exercise of it in the church of England to be inconsistent with the ecclesiastical canons. The fact rests on the attestation of a contemporary author of great respectability: Knox himself speaks, in one of his treatises, of the "high promotions" offered him by Edward; and afterwards affirms, that he had refused a bishopric.*

Knox, notwithstanding his conscientious scruples, came off pretty well; and the offered preferment was not forced upon him, on the rigorous terms of ecclesiastical conformity: but the celebrated Hooper, under similar circumstances, was not equally successful. John Rogers and bishop Hooper are represented as the very "ringleaders" of the nonconformists to king Edward's political church, and are said to have "renounced all ceremonies practised by the papists, conceiving, that such ought not only to be clipt with shears, but shaven with a razor; yea, all the stumps thereof pluckt out." Hooper was a divine eminently distinguished for piety, zeal, and learning, particularly in the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew tongues. He had been driven from his native country, and forced to seek an asylum in a foreign land, by the cruel persecutions of king Henry; but, upon his return, was made chaplain to the duke of Somerset, and became a famous preacher in the city of London.† His sound learning and great worth recommended him to the court; and, notwithstanding his well known conscientious scruples in matters of conformity, he received the royal nomination to the bishopric of Gloucester.

Hooper had very powerful objections against accepting the offered promotion, on the rigorous terms and conditions now

* M'Crie's Knox, vol. i. p. 98—101.

† Fuller, b. vii. p. 402.—Strype's Cranmer, p. 211.

established ; and these objections being made known to the king, the earl of Warwick, now rising in power, was appointed to write to archbishop Cranmer, recommending the exercise of lenity and forbearance at his consecration. He addressed the learned primate in these words :—" These are to desire, that in such reasonable things, wherein this bearer, my lord elect of Gloucester, craveth to be borne with at your hands, you would vouchsafe to show him your grace's favour : the rather at this my instance, which thing I have taken in hand partly by the king's majesty's own motion. The matter is weighed by his highness, that your grace may easily condescend thereunto. The principal cause is, that you would not charge this said bearer with an oath burdensome to his conscience."

Notwithstanding the interposition of the highest authority, and the amiable and tolerant advice of the king, Cranmer having " no inclination to gratify such singularities, refused to comply."* Although the reformation had made considerable progress in England, besides other ceremonies more ambitious than profitable or tending to edification, the protestant bishops used to wear similar garments and apparel as the popish bishops : as, " first, a chymere, and under that a white rocket, then a mathematical cap with four angles, dividing the world into four parts. As these trifles, tending more to superstition than otherwise, Hooper could never abide ; so in no wise could he be persuaded to wear them."† He, therefore, presented his most humble petition to the king, either to be discharged of the bishopric, or to have these ceremonies dispensed with. This awakened the sympathy and attention of the pious and discerning prince ; a dispensation was immediately granted ; and Edward himself addressed the following letter to the archbishop :

" Whereas we, by the advice of our council, have called and chosen our right well-beloved and well-worthy Mr. John Hooper, professor of divinity, to be our bishop of Gloucester ; as well for his great learning, deep judgment, and long study, both in the Scriptures, and profane learning ; as also for his good discretion, ready utterance, and honest life for that kind of vocation : to the intent all our loving subjects, which are

* Collier, vol. ii. p. 292.

† Fox, vol. iii. p. 120.

in his charge and elsewhere, might by his sound and true doctrine learn better their duty towards God, their obedience towards us, and love towards their neighbours: from the consecrating of whom, we understand you to stay, because he would have you omit and let pass certain rites and ceremonies offensive to his conscience, whereby you think you should fall into premunire of laws: We have thought good, by the advice aforesaid, to dispense and discharge you of all manner of dangers, penalties, and forfeitures, you should run into, and be in any manner of way, by omitting any of the same. And these our letters shall be your sufficient warrant and discharge.”*

Notwithstanding these applications from the prince and the council, the venerable primate stood firm in his defence of the old ecclesiastical ceremonies and usages, saying, “It was but a small matter, and that the fault consisted in the abuse of things, not in the things themselves: adding, that Hooper ought not to be so stubborn in so light a matter, and that his wilfulness therein was not to be suffered!”† This was strange language in the mouth of a protestant archbishop!

Hooper declined the offered preferment on two grounds;—First, because of the form of the oath, which he considered as foul and impious. Secondly, because of the popish habits to be used in consecration. The oath required him to swear by *the saints*, as well as by the name of God; which Hooper considered as impious, because the Searcher of hearts *alone* ought, in his opinion, to be appealed to in an oath. The young king, convinced of the propriety of this, struck out the words with his own pen.‡ But the scruples about the habits were not so easily got over. The king and his council were perfectly willing to dispense with them, as the foregoing documents bear ample testimony; but archbishop Cranmer and bishop Ridley were of another mind, and absolutely refused their allowance. “Since there was no coming at the episcopal character, without going through the customary forms,” attempts were made to satisfy Hooper’s conscience.§ Ridley was, therefore, nominated to a disputation with him, in order

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 120.

† Ibid.

‡ Burnet, vol. iii. p. 203.

§ Collier, vol. ii. p. 292.

if possible to bring him to a compliance; but this proved altogether ineffectual.

Hooper, indeed, used every means in his power to obtain the resolution of his objections, and the removal of his scruples; and, to this end, he addressed letters to Peter Martyr and Martin Bucer, desiring their sentiments on the present controversy. These learned divines gave their opinions against the habits, as inventions of antichrist, and wished them removed out of the church; but thought, since the bishops were so resolute, that he might use them for a time, till they should be taken away by law; especially, as the reformation was in its infancy, and, to see the Reformers at variance among themselves, would give occasion of triumph to the common enemy. After all, he still remained unconvinced; he, therefore, prayed to be excused from the old symbolizing popish garments, the use of which, in the service of God, was contrary to the dictates of his conscience. These garments, he observed, had no countenance in Scripture or primitive antiquity: they were the inventions of antichrist, and introduced into the church in the most corrupt ages: they had been abused to idolatry, particularly in the pompous celebration of the mass: and to continue the use of them was, in his opinion, to symbolize with antichrist, to mislead the people, and inconsistent with the simplicity of the Gospel. He could, therefore, appeal to the Searcher of hearts, that it was not obstinacy, but the convictions of his conscience alone, which constrained him to this continued refusal.*

Ridley's efforts proving unsuccessful, Hooper was committed to the management of Cranmer; who, unable to remove his convictions and bring him to a compliance, laid the affair before the council, and he was committed to the Fleet. Having remained in prison from August till March, the matter was brought to a compromise, when he was released and consecrated.† He consented to put on the vestments at his consecration, when he preached before the king, and in his own cathedral: but was suffered to dispense with them on other occasions.‡ This theological quarrel occasioned true Christians

* Fuller, b. vii. p. 404.

† Strype's Cranmer, p. 211—215.

‡ Burnet, vol. ii. p. 166.

to lament, and the adversaries to rejoice; and the bishops having the upper-hand, Hooper was fain to agree sometimes to show himself appareled as the other bishops were. Wherefore, appointed to preach before the king, he came forth in a strange apparel as a new player on the stage. His upper garment was a long scarlet chymere down to the foot, and under that a white linen rocket that covered his shoulders; and upon his head was a geometrical or four-square cap, although his head was round. "What cause of shame," adds our venerable author, "was this to that good preacher, every man may easily judge; but this private reproach, for the public benefit of the church, which he only sought, he bore and suffered patiently. And I would to God, that they, who took upon them the other part of that tragedy, had yielded their private cause, whatsoever it was, to the public concord and edifying of the church; for no man in all the city was one hair the better for their hot contention."*

How this business was adjusted, and with what degree of unchristian severity Hooper was persecuted, is related by Mr. Fox, in the Latin edition of his "Acts and Monuments of the Martyrs." The passage, which he has left out of all his English editions, from too great tenderness to the party, is expressed in these words;—"Thus," says he, "ended this theological quarrel in the victory of the bishops, Hooper being forced to recant; or, to say the least, being constrained to appear once in public, attired after the manner of the bishops. Which, unless he had done, there are those who think the bishops would have endeavoured to take away his life: for his servant told me, that the duke of Suffolk sent such word to Hooper, who was not himself ignorant what they were doing."† Horrid barbarity! Who, before Hooper, was ever thrown into prison, and in danger of his life, merely because he refused a bishopric? He thought, as he well might, that this usage was somewhat severe. To miss his promotion was no disappointment; but to be punished because he would not be a bishop, to be persecuted about garments, and to lose his liberty and be in danger of his life, for refusing the vestments of the papists, was possibly more than he could understand. It is cer-

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 121.

† Peirce, part i. p. 30.

tainly some kind of excuse, that the bishops would not consecrate him contrary to law, though they, indeed, obtained the royal dispensation; but there can be no excuse for his imprisonment, and their conspiring to take away his life. When Hooper, with a most noble and disinterested spirit, declined the lucrative promotion, and wished to be exempt from the offered preferment on the conditions required; was there any law to constrain him to be a bishop, contrary to the convictions of his conscience? Such are the disgraceful hostilities against the rights of conscience and the just liberties of man, when one part of the community attempts to provide and impose ecclesiastical ceremonies, upon their fellow-creatures. Ridley, who was by far the most severe against Hooper, lived to change his opinions, as we shall find in the next reign.

While Hooper was barbarously persecuted about clothes and ceremonies, others were treated with wanton cruelty on account of their obnoxious *doctrines*. The eyes of the famous Reformers were so much dazzled with the present establishment, that they could not properly discern the true nature and influence of Christianity. They discovered the horrors of popish bigotry, when they themselves were the sufferers; but they perceived not the hideousness of protestant intolerance, when they were persecuting their fellow-protestants. The doctrine of unrestricted toleration was unknown. The Reformers, indeed, claimed it for themselves, but it was on the ground that their opinions were scriptural and true; and they denied it to others, whose dogmas they accounted false and full of blasphemy; not considering, that, under the same charges, they themselves were persecuted by the papists. It was evidently their general opinion, that heresy ought not only to be restrained, but punished by the magistrate. A pernicious sentiment!

We have sometimes heard of Cranmer's *burning* principles: on more occasions than one he acted on those principles, even in the reign of king Edward, though surely not much to the honour of his character. In this reign there were certain persons, not conformable to the religion of the state, who propagated their opinions in various parts of the country; but, to suppress them and their opinions, archbishop Cranmer and several of his brethren received a commission, "to examine

and search after all anabaptists, heretics, or contemners of the Common-prayer." As the commissioners were able to discover such dangerous persons, they were required, if possible, to reclaim them, and, after penance, to give them absolution ; but all who continued obstinate, were to be excommunicated, cast into prison, and delivered over to the secular power. Several tradesmen in London being convened before these reverend commissioners, abjured ; but Joan Bocher was made a public example. She steadfastly maintained, " That Christ was not truly incarnate of the virgin, whose flesh being sinful, he could not partake of it ; but the Word, by the consent of the inward man of the virgin, was made flesh."* These were her own words ; not capable of doing much mischief, and surely, undeserving any severe punishment. The poor woman could not reconcile the spotless purity of Christ, with his receiving flesh from a sinful creature ; for which she was declared an obstinate heretic, and delivered over to the secular power to be burnt. If this female, whose practice is highly commended,† believed the most flagrant nonsense, must she, therefore, be burnt to death ? Do the principles of orthodoxy eradicate and destroy the principles of humanity ? Are persons able to believe whatsoever others command them ? And will they burn them for not doing that which to them is impossible ? Had the apostles and first preachers of the Gospel delivered such doctrine, when the Saviour commanded them to " teach all nations," they would not have greatly promoted the cause so manifestly founded in cruelty and injustice.

It is, indeed, of little consequence what this woman's opinions were, since, in suffering for them, she became as much a martyr as the archbishop himself. The compassionate young king was persuaded, that burning persons for their religious opinions was that for which they censured the papists, and opposed to the spirit and doctrines of Christianity : therefore, when he could not in conscience sign the warrant for her execution, Cranmer's sophistry and superior learning were employed to persuade him. " Your majesty must distinguish," said the primate, " between common opinions, and such as are essential articles of faith. These latter, we must, on no occa-

* Burnet, vol. ii. Rec. p. 167.

† Strype's Eccl. Mem. vol. ii. p. 214.

sion suffer to be opposed.”* “A prince being God’s deputy ought to punish impieties against God.”† It was indeed marvellous, that a man of Cranmer’s understanding and good temper could thus impose upon himself such barbarous delusions, in direct opposition to the doctrine and spirit of the Gospel. Edward, however, still remained unconvinced, and looked upon it as most flagrant inhumanity and barbarity; and when at length he yielded reluctantly to the primate’s importunity, he told him, with tears in his eyes, “That if he did wrong, since it was in submission to his authority, he should answer for it to God.” This “struck the archbishop with much horror;” who, nevertheless, suffered the sentence to be executed.‡ The Christian sentiments of a youth only eleven years old, would have been no disgrace to the archbishop of threescore!

The persecution and burning of heretics did not stop here. We have another instance, equally shocking to all the sympathies of human nature, and equally disgraceful to the page of English history. The commission given to the primate and his colleagues, was little better than a protestant Inquisition; the proceedings of which afford the clearest proof that men have sometimes turned their power and policy, into despotism and cruelty. Cranmer did not renounce this worst kind of intolerance so long as he remained in power; for about two years after the murder of Bocher, his hands were again employed in the same bloody work. George Van Paris, a Dutchman, was convicted of the imaginary crime of heresy. Being urged to abjure, but remaining steadfast, he was condemned as an obstinate heretic, and burnt in Smithfield, April 25, 1551.§ No part of the archbishop’s life was more deserving of censure than this; but he never discovered the absurdity and wickedness of his persecuting principles, till they were turned against himself. This, the papists called a just retaliation of Providence, and frequently cited the cruelties of the protestants in *this* reign, as a justification of their own barbarities in the *next*: nor could the infernal logic be well refuted.

The foregoing executions, so contrary to the clemency of the

* Gilpin, vol. ii. p. 99.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 111.

‡ Burnet, vol. ii. p. 112.

§ Ibid.

Gospel and every principle of humanity, brought just reproach upon the Reformers; who, it is plain, were only against burning when they were in danger of it themselves. Whatever were Cranmer's motives for this antichristian violence, though cruelty was not his natural temper, he is justly denominated "a bigoted persecutor."* Some writers, adds the primate's biographer, have undertaken a vindication of him; but I spare their indiscretion. "Let the horrid act be universally disclaimed. To palliate, is to participate. With indignation let it be recorded, as that which above all other things has disgraced that Religious Liberty, which our ancestors so nobly purchased. Indeed, the two acts of blood stand upon record, as a shameful and indelible stain upon the annals of the reformation."†

Great numbers there were in this reign, who, claiming the right of private judgment, discovered many things extremely objectionable in the new establishment, and scrupled that rigorous conformity which the civil power required, but attended upon divine worship and administered the sacraments in a manner different from that prescribed in the Book of Common-prayer. To prevent the number of these nonconformists from increasing, and to crush all who had already imbibed their sentiments, other commissions were issued, empowering Cranmer and his colleagues to correct and punish them.‡ At this time a new sect of nonconformists sprung up in Kent; and, though their peculiar sentiments do not appear, they were shamefully harassed by the primate and his brethren. Mr. Fox, in the Latin edition of his "Martyrs," has transmitted to us, that Humphrey Middleton, with some others, had been kept prisoners in the last year of king Edward by the archbishop, and had been dreadfully teased by him and the rest in commission, and were just upon the point of being *condemned*: when Middleton in open court said: "Well, reverend Sir, pass what sentence you think fit upon us; but that you may not say you were not forewarned, I testify that your own turn will be next." And it came to pass accordingly; for a little while after king Edward died, when the prisoners were set at

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 278.—Gilpin, vol. ii. p. 98. † Ibid. p. 98—100. i. 422.

‡ Strype's Cranmer, p. 291.—Parker, p. 27.

liberty, and the archbishop and bishops cast into prison.* Such was the folly and madness of persecuting men, on the ground of their religious opinions !

The legislature has in later times thought proper to pare the talons of the prelates ; yet in some of the succeeding reigns, when our princes have, through weakness or bad policy, countenanced their usurped power, it has been employed with no less severity than formerly, against all who have disapproved of their intolerance. They could not, indeed, extend their cruelties to actual martyrdom; yet they have sought to rob them of their liberty, their characters, and their fortunes. The pious young king died at Greenwich, July 6, 1553, in the seventeenth year of his age, having reigned a little more than six years and five months.

The state of religion and of morals, during this reign, was deplorable. The principal courtiers gave proofs, too unequivocal to be mistaken, of their indifference to all religion, and of their readiness to acquiesce, and even to assist, in the re-establishment of all the ancient superstitions, whenever a change of rulers should render that measure expedient and practicable. The court, and even the whole government, was in a state of the greatest disorder. The example of the young king was a noble and instructive exception ; and would in time, no doubt, have had its influence ; but, as he was yet only a boy, and in the hands of others, his principles and practice had little weight. A minority was deemed the proper season for every one to make his claim ; and such claims were made by all who had any pretensions to court-favours, as equally surprised and scandalized all persons of sober reflection. There was scarcely an ecclesiastical benefice in the nation of any considerable value, on which some greedy courtier was not pensioned. To this insatiable avarice, was added a licentiousness of manners, not exceeded in former times.

A court thus corrupt, produced its necessary consequence, corruption in every order of the state. Never was justice worse administered : never were the dispensers of it more mercenary. The public offices were equally corrupt, especially those of the revenue, where the most scandalous depredations were com-

* Peirce, part i. p. 35.

mitted. The country itself was not innocent. There the gentry practised those arts of avarice and rapine, which they had learned at court, and taught the people all the vices and abominations of human nature. And the generality of the clergy, instead of attempting to lessen the mass of corruption and iniquity, by a mixture of piety and devotion, incorporated with it, and even increased the malignity by the addition of as bad or worse abominations.*

The bishops and clergy in general were in a state of the utmost degradation. The character of the former is thus described by Hooper :—" For the space of four hundred years after Christ, the bishops applied all their wit only to their own vocation, to the glory of God, and the honour of the realms. Though they had not so much upon their heads, as our bishops have ; yet had they more within their heads, as the Scripture and histories testify. For they applied all the wit they had, to the vocation and ministry of the church to which they were called. But our bishops have so much wit, that they can rule and serve in both the church and the civil policy, when one of them is more than any man is able to satisfy. If he be so necessary at court, that in civil causes he cannot be spared, let him use that vocation, and spare the other : it is impossible he should do both well. It is a great oversight in princes thus charging them with two burdens : the primitive church *had no such bishops*." And good old Latimer, in his facetious sermon on the " Plough," presents the following picture of their avarice, ambition and indolence :—" Since lording and loitering came up, preaching hath gone down, contrary to the apostles' times. For they preached and lorded not ; and now they lord and preach not. They that be lords will not go to the plough. It is no meet office for them : it is not seeming for their estate. Thus came up lording loiterers. Thus crept in unpreaching prelates. How many unlearned prelates have we at this day ? And no marvel ; for if the ploughmen that now be, were made lords, they would clean give over ploughing : they would leave their labour, and fall to lording outright, and the plough would stand, and the commonwealth be filled with hunger. For ever since the prelates were made lords and nobles, their plough

* Gilpin, vol. i. p. 428, 429.

standeth ; there is no work done ; the people starve : they hawk, they hunt, they card, they dice, they pass their time in their palaces with gallant gentlemen ; so that ploughing is set aside. By their lording and loitering, preaching and ploughing is clean gone.”*

The inferior clergy were, in general, as unable as they were unwilling to instruct the people, whose ignorance, superstitions, and debaucheries overspread the land. This evil, which had prevailed universally under popery, instead of being corrected, was considerably augmented, by a ruinous measure at the commencement of the reformation. When Henry suppressed the monasteries, and seized their revenues, he allotted pensions to the monks during life ; but to relieve the royal treasury of this burden, small benefices in the gift of the crown were afterwards substituted in the place of pensions. The example of the king was imitated by the nobles, who had procured monastic lands. By this means a great part of the inferior livings were held by ignorant and superstitious monks, who were a dead weight upon the church of England, constantly opposing all attempts to release the nation from the papal yoke. The suppression of the chantries and the remaining monasteries, in the reign of king Edward, was followed by similar unhappy consequences, and a principal cause of the nation’s sudden relapse to popery, upon the subsequent accession of queen Mary.†

As to the service of the church, says the famous Martin Bucer, who lived in these times, it was performed in so cold, lame, and unintelligible a manner, that the people were but little better edified, than if the office had been said in the Indian language. The people could hardly distinguish between the mass, and the Lord’s supper, excepting that the latter was in English. The pastoral duties were so lamentably neglected, that there were no catechetical instructions, no private admonitions, no public censures of disorder ; and the discipline of the church was so far out of use, that its spiritual authority was nearly disregarded, and the people were promiscuously admitted to the communion, without any proof of their qualifica-

* Huntley’s Prelates, p. 32—35.

† Burnet, vol. ii. p. 24.—Strype’s Eccl. Mem. vol. ii. p. 446.

tions either in faith or practice. The pastors made a very insignificant and empty appearance before the Lord, and took very little care of the poor of their flocks. The churches were made places of commerce and diversion. "Alas !" he adds, "the meaning of the church, the communion of saints, and the kingdom of Christ, is but little understood: the want of discipline is the occasion of this unhappy ignorance. Thus, the fear of God, and the notion of religion, makes a very faint impression; and hence it is, that lying, cheating, theft, perjury and whoredom, are so much the complaint of the times."*

It is lamentable to behold the prelates, who to this day are most renowned as martyrs for the reformation, busily employed, during this most favourable period, in persecuting those whom they called their reforming brethren, about habits, ceremonies, and other trifles, which they owned to be popish, and occupied with a political conversion of the country, by royal mandates and episcopal visitations; when, as they might have foreseen the shortness of life, they ought to have filled the kingdom with the preaching of the pure Gospel, which might have rescued many immortal souls from guilty superstitions, and perhaps have prevented the melancholy changes which presently followed. These were not the times of promoting religion by affectionate persuasion, and on the ground of its heavenly attractions; but, such was the common delusion, that even the generality of the bishops, elated with supreme power, seemed to think, that religion wholly consisted in external observances, and that men were to be made Christians by episcopal injunctions and acts of parliament.

* Collier, vol. ii. p. 294.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REIGN OF QUEEN MARY.



SECTION I.

England's Subjection to the Papal Yoke followed by Antichristian Oppressions.

THE great work of reformation, begun under such favourable circumstances, and advanced with so much success, as stated in the foregoing chapter, was suddenly blasted on the accession of queen MARY. She succeeded to many of the bad qualities of her father Henry, but to none of the good ones of her brother Edward. Having been trained a bigoted papist, she felt no remorse at spilling human blood, when religion was her pretence.* On all occasions, she discovered a mind haunted by gloomy superstition, and a will entirely under the control of her popish clergy. A sad reverse of events, therefore, now opens to our view.

Mary exercised great policy till she got the power into her own hands. For previous to her final settlement on the throne, being on her progress to the metropolis, she gave the most plausible assurances, that religion should continue as already by law established. These assurances greatly contributed to multiply the number of her friends, who signified their readiness to sacrifice their lives and fortunes in her cause, especially in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. Having made the fairest promises, particularly to the Suffolkmen, that no alteration should be made in the state of religion, but that all things should remain in the same state as she found them, and that she would be perfectly satisfied with the liberty of professing her own religion, or at most in securing liberty of conscience to her own party; they flattered themselves in the continuance of their present protestant privileges. These promises and assur-

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 48.

ances were Mary's "court holy-water, which she sprinkled upon the people."*

On the third of August, the queen made her entry into the city of London with much solemn pomp, accompanied by the princess Elizabeth, who had raised a thousand horse for her service, during her contest for the crown. Having entered the tower, after releasing several prisoners, she sent for the lord-mayor and aldermen, and told them, "That though she was herself fixed in her religion, she would not compel others." These honourable assurances could not fail to make a favourable impression on the minds of the people; but her majesty's soft words were soon forgotten, as appears from the severities which presently followed. The day on which the funeral of king Edward was solemnized, the queen declared in council, "That though her own conscience was settled in matters of religion, she was resolved not to compel others, only as God should put into their hearts a persuasion of that truth which she believed; and this she hoped would be done by opening his word to them by godly, virtuous, and learned preachers."† Great care was taken to disperse this declaration, and to magnify it everywhere as a remarkable instance of her majesty's clemency and goodness.

The queen, who was a violent papist, could not long conceal her design. Not many days after her arrival in London, she began to prevaricate, and further declared, "That she would not compel her subjects to be of her religion, *till public order should be taken.*"‡ This was a plain signal of her majesty's intention. Without much penetration, the protestants now clearly foresaw, that the queen, in violation of all her declarations and promises, intended to overthrow the reformation, and restore the superstitions and corruptions of popery; and the catholics were so confident of it, that they not only made it their public boast, but immediately treated the protestants as heretics, contrary to the existing laws.

At this juncture, the queen issued her royal proclamation, the design of which was too clear to be misunderstood. The terms were, indeed, so artfully managed, that they implied much more than they seemed to express. As is usually the

* Fuller, b. viii. p. 6.

† Burnet, vol. ii. p. 245.

‡ Ibid.

case with ecclesiastical tyrants, who are total strangers to the spirit and principles of the Gospel, she signified that great inconveniences and dangers had formerly arisen from a diversity of religious opinions, and that contentions were again revived within her dominions ; she would have all her loving subjects to understand, that she was of that religion which God and the world knew she had professed from her infancy, and to which she intended to adhere during life ; she passionately wished all her subjects would quietly and charitably receive it : but said, “ of her most *gracious disposition* and *clemency*, that she minded not to compel them, *until* further order should by common consent be taken.” This plainly discovered her intention to change religion by act of parliament, and that then she should be discharged from her promises of not compelling the consciences of her people. She then forbade her subjects calling one another by the odious names of “ papist and heretic.” The protestants considered this prohibition as levelled entirely against themselves ; because they clearly understood, that disobedience in this case would be punished in them, but not in the opposite party. She afterwards prohibited “ all public assemblies,” and threatened to inflict the most severe punishment upon those who should be found promoting them. This article had the same construction as the foregoing.

By another clause in her majesty’s proclamation, she said ;— “ For as much as it is well known, that by the subtlety and malice of certain evil-disposed persons, who take upon them without sufficient authority to preach and to interpret the word of God *after their own brain*, and also by playing of interludes, and printing of false books, ballads, rhymes, and other lewd treatises in the English tongue, touching the doctrines and mysteries of the Christian religion ; which books and treatises are sold to her majesty’s subjects of evil zeal, for lucre and covetousness ; her highness, therefore, straitly chargeth and commandeth all her subjects, of whatsoever state or degree, not to presume to preach, interpret, or teach any Scripture or point of doctrine, nor print any book or treatise, without her majesty’s special license for the same, upon pain of incurring her indignation and displeasure.” The proclamation closed by declaring, that the queen was resolved to punish rigorously all who should be found fomenting pernicious designs ; but she

hoped there would be no cause to execute the severity of the law. This clause naturally inspired the protestants with terror; for it was easy to foresee, that religion and the laws were about to be changed, and that those who should refuse to submit blindly to the new statutes, would be considered as rebels.*

It was, indeed, impossible not to see from this proclamation, the first thing published in the queen's name after her accession, that she intended to restore popery, the religion of her infancy, as soon as the concurrence of parliament could be obtained. As a preparatory step, all the pulpits in England, that were in the hands of the protestants, were at once laid under the severest interdict; for they could not have the most distant prospect of obtaining a license. To put the matter, however, from the possibility of doubt, if any doubt still remained, by what spirit the queen intended to rule, more convincing proofs at this time transpired. The protestant inhabitants of Suffolk, who had assisted her majesty against a potent party in obtaining her crown, presuming on her royal promise, took a little more liberty than others, and, finding themselves in some difficulty, sent deputies to put the queen in mind of her royal promise. Their petition was rejected with great haughtiness, and considered the more offensive, as it justly suspected the failure of her majesty's word. One of them in particular, who ventured to speak on this occasion, was severely punished by being placed three times in the pillory; and she told the rest, "that they being only members wished to rule her that was their head; but they should one day perceive, that members ought to obey their head, and not think to bear rule over her." Others having supplicated the throne for the permanent continuance of the established doctrine, were immediately apprehended and cast into prison!† A man must, therefore, have been wilfully blind not to have seen with what spirit the queen intended to govern; when her subjects were treated thus only for reminding her of her own promises, and requesting that the doctrines of religion might remain unaltered.

Upon the queen's intention to bring the nation into subjection to the papal yoke, her thoughts were much divided about

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 14.

† Ibid. p. 13.—Burnet, vol. ii. p. 246.

two schemes which her friends offered to her attention. On the one hand she was recommended, now she had the power, to keep no measures, but to force the nation to return immediately "to the union of the catholic church;" and to this rash measure she was of her own inclination strongly disposed, having already determined to send for cardinal Pole as legate to reconcile England to the pope. On the other hand, bishop Gardiner, who was certainly the ablest man of his party, persuaded that the reformation ought to be pulled down in the same way in which it had been set up, proposed only to bring religion back at first to the state in which it was left at the death of king Henry; and then to raise it afterwards by degrees to its former splendour previous to that monarch's revolt from Rome. The advice of this crafty prelate, which was certainly more politic, as well as more conducive to his own personal interest, was not much relished by the queen, whose bigotry could not be so well appeased by it, and who supposed that the papal authority was necessary to remove her illegitimation. The bishop answered this objection, by assuring her majesty, that all the acts and sentences which had passed against her might be annulled in parliament, without the assistance of the pope. Finding, however, that his counsel was not of sufficient weight, and dreading the arrival of Pole, his enemy, who would certainly take the lead in public affairs, if not bring ruin upon him, the sagacious bishop sent a messenger to the emperor of Germany, with assurance that, if he would persuade the queen to make him chancellor and first minister, he would in time bring about every thing she desired: but that if Pole was to come to England at so early a period as the queen desired, the cardinal's zeal for the see of Rome would undo all; because, as he further observed, the English were now averse to submit again to the papacy, not only from their dread of its power, which had been considered as the most tyrannical cruelty, but also because they had purchased the church lands from the crown on very easy terms, with which they were not disposed to part. It was therefore necessary, in his opinion, to give the people time to wear out their prejudices; but by precipitation, the whole cause would be in danger, if not ruined, with even the queen herself. To this advice, which was certainly the most politic, the bishop

did not forget to add his assurance of promoting the particular interests of the emperor, if he should be intrusted by the queen with the chief direction of public affairs : and he might also suggest the project of a marriage between the emperor's son Philip and the queen. The emperor saw the advice to be good, and he closed with it immediately. He wrote several letters with his own hand to the queen, persuading her to moderate her zeal about religion, not to make too much haste in her return to Rome, nor to be too much led by Italian counsels. The queen held the emperor in great esteem ; and, though she considered Gardiner as a crafty temporizer, she accepted the bishop's scheme, gave him the great seal, and committed to him the direction of national affairs.*

In conformity to her majesty's proclamation, and to the deep-laid project of the crafty prelate, a commission was presently given to his lordship, empowering him to grant licenses under the great seal, to such grave, discreet, and learned persons as he should think meet and able to preach the word of God. The clergy, who had the legislative authority to preach in their respective parishes, could not be legally silenced, unless they had violated some existing law ; therefore if they had continued to preach in their own parishes only, without taking the least notice of the proclamation, they could not have been legally punished. To have inflicted punishment upon them, would have been flagrant injustice, and robbing them of their rights. There was no breach of duty in preaching in the churches prior to the proclamation ; therefore there could be none after it. This proclamation was not authorized by act of parliament, and a sovereign could not by his proclamation create any offence which was not an offence before ; for then he might in very important cases alter the law of the land by his proclamation. The council, however, being informed that many of the clergy continued preaching without the new license, Hooper and Coverdale, who had given them countenance, were convened before them ; when the former was committed to the Fleet, the latter confined in his own house, and the obnoxious clergy sent to different prisons. Thus, the Reformers having in the last reign been guilty of the illegal ex-

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 242.

ercise of power, by putting the popish bishops out of their way ; the opposite party now returned the compliment, and inflicted similar illegal punishment upon their brethren.

The common people were equally forward in changing religion, by setting up images and introducing the Latin service, with all the old ceremonies, without the warrant of law. This was extremely gratifying to the queen, who encouraged their forwardness to the utmost of her power. But as these proceedings were evidently contrary to the laws still in force, judge Hales made it a part of his charge to all the justices in his circuit, to put the acts of parliament relating to religion in execution ; for which good service and important duty he was sent to the Marshalsea, then removed to the Compter, and thence to the Fleet. The queen, in this stretch of her prerogative, showed not only that she had lost all sense of justice, in punishing a judge thus illegally, and, by her wanton power, for discharging his duty ; but also that she was destitute of sympathy or gratitude, when they came in competition with her zeal for popery. The reader must remember, what her majesty could not have forgotten, that Hales was the only judge upon the bench who refused to sign the instrument to exclude her succession to the crown. Any person would have supposed, that, had he been guilty of some offence, this circumstance alone would have made atonement in the estimation of her majesty ; but especially that she would have refrained from acts of violence, by punishing him for doing that which the laws required him to do. But she was a woman without bowels of compassion, or any ties of justice or of honour, when her religion was at all concerned. The terms may be strong, but the fact is obvious ; as will appear with too much evidence in the progress of her reign.

Her majesty discovered similar unfeeling rigour and base ingratitude to the lord chief justice Montague ; who, though he withstood to the utmost the alteration of the succession, and most openly declared for the queen at the death of Edward ; yet, since he was zealous for the reformation, he was expelled from his office, cast into prison, and fined a thousand pounds and part of his estate : while Bromley, who had without reluctance concurred in the queen's exclusion, but a known papist, was placed in his office. These effects

of the queen's furious and unrelenting bigotry, were only trifles when compared with numberless other instances of which she was guilty.*

The queen had already given so many evident proofs of her intention against the patrons of the reformation, that archbishop Cranmer could not expect the least clemency; and his friends foreseeing this, advised him to withdraw in time, and escape out of the kingdom. But his grace replied to this advice, with a greatness of mind becoming his high station, and worthy of a Christian bishop, that though he would not dissuade others from avoiding persecution; yet, considering the post he held, and the principal part he had taken in all the changes relating to religion, he thought it indecent for him to flee from the storm; so no entreaties could prevail upon him.

He had already been convened before the council, and was confined prisoner in his own house, when slanderous reports were propagated by bishop Bonner and others about his intended submission. To silence these calumnies, he published a declaration, in which he expressed his abhorrence of the mass as a species of idolatry, and declared his entire approbation of all the changes during the late reign. He also offered, with her majesty's leave, to defend the Book of Common-prayer, and the whole order and doctrine of religion set forth by the late king, as more pure and more agreeable to the word of God, than any sort of religion that had been in England for above a thousand years; provided all things might be judged and determined by the *Scriptures*, and that the reasonings on both sides might be faithfully written down.†

This paper was considered by some as a noble instance of Christian magnanimity, well becoming the primate of England, and by others as a piece of indiscreet and intemperate zeal. The queen was much incensed, and the council not a little displeased at his resolute spirit; but they could not suddenly determine what to do with him. The moderate part of the council, perhaps out of regard to his official character, or apprehending the ill consequences of proceeding to extremities, as he was exceedingly beloved, wished only to have him deprived, and a pension allowed him, on condition that he intermeddled

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 223, 247, 248.—Warner, vol. ii. p. 326. † Ibid. p. 328.

not with religion. But others, of warmer spirits and more fiery zeal, or who perhaps thought to make their court to the queen, objected to this clemency: they declared that Cranmer had been the author of all the heresy in the kingdom: and, if he should be treated with tenderness, others would take encouragement to be more obstinate. It was, therefore, at length determined, "that he should be committed to the tower, to be dealt with according to her majesty's pleasure."

The gloomy temper of the government now became very apparent; and so much violence attended all its proceedings, in which religion was concerned, that it was easy to foresee that no measures of charity or of decency were to be expected. The queen delighted in being called a virgin sent from heaven to revenge the cause of God. Under such a government, and such a princess, what could be expected but bigotry and superstition, with all their direful effects? * The archbishops and most of the bishops were, accordingly, deprived of their sees. The most famous preachers in London were cast into prison, and many thousands of the clergy, for having entered the marriage state, were turned out of their livings; some of whom were deprived without conviction; some were never cited to appear; and many, being confined in prison, and unable to appear, were cited and deprived for non-appearance. Upon these unnatural and cruel proceedings, above a thousand persons left the country and sought an asylum in a foreign land; among whom were five bishops, five deans, four archdeacons, and a great number of doctors in divinity and celebrated preachers. † The council, however, obtaining information of the numerous emigrations, sent special orders to all the ports in England that no persons should in future leave the country without a certificate from those in authority. The queen also issued another proclamation, in which she commanded, "all persons being foreigners, whether preachers, printers, booksellers, artificers, or of whatsoever calling, to depart the kingdom within twenty-four days, upon pain of most grievous imprisonment, and forfeiture of all their goods." ‡ By this cruel mandate Peter Martyr, John A. Lasco, and nume-

* Gilpin, vol. ii. p. 135.

† Burnet, vol. ii. p. 276.

‡ Fox, vol. iii. p. 32.

rous other foreign protestants, were driven from their honourable and useful stations.*

About ten days after her majesty's coronation, the parliament assembled; and the session was opened by a solemn mass according to the old popish custom, though that custom was abolished by law. The queen and her ministry discovered, on this occasion, their preposterous haste, by openly violating what was already established. The reader will no doubt be surprised to find, that the members of the upper house, who only a few months before, seven or eight excepted, were all professed protestants, and promoted the reformation of king Edward, should now almost to a man turn zealous catholics. It will be difficult to ascertain in which reign they dissembled their principles, if they had any principles; but it is easy to discover, that in both reigns they were guilty of scandalous prevarication. But how was it in the house of commons? The number of protestants in the kingdom are represented as much greater than that of catholics; and of course a free election could not be very favourable to the queen's design of restoring popery, which must be done by the aid of parliament. In addition, therefore, to the ordinary methods of princes to procure a parliament on their own side, every artifice, and fraud, and even violence was practised, to carry the elections in favour of the crown. Thus, the first parliament of this reign, was a parliament filled in the commons house with creatures of the court, and in the lords, a few excepted, with men who, through ambition, avarice or fear, dissembled their religious sentiments, or were indifferent to all religion.†

A bill was, accordingly, introduced into the two houses to establish her majesty's legitimacy and the legality of her succession to the crown. Henry's divorce was, therefore, repealed in fewer days, than he and his ministers had employed years in effecting it. Gardiner certainly performed his promise; but it is not possible that he could have any sense of shame, when he procured the repeal of a sentence, and upon allegations so notoriously false, which he himself had chiefly promoted in the most servile manner before Cranmer was known at court: yea,

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 250

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 331.

which he approved, recommended, and assisted to accomplish as judge when it was pronounced ! This scandalous instability, or rather total want of principle, was awfully characteristic of the times.

Another bill was introduced to the commons, and passed without a division, for repealing all the laws about religion made in the late reign. This bill enacted, that there should be no other form of divine service than that which had been used towards the close of the reign of Henry VIII. ; and thus was religion, which king Edward had so much at heart, and which the Reformers, with so much zeal and assiduity laboured to establish, brought by a single act of parliament into the errors and superstitions in which the old king had left it : which was properly the religion of no one but himself.*

The bigoted queen, resolved upon the total extinction of the reformation, availed herself of the supremacy of the crown, an authority hostile to her feelings and principles, to carry on her favourite project, which was opposed to the laws and liberties of the kingdom. She took the affairs of the church into her own hands, and authorized her chancellor to give all the necessary instructions to all the bishops and others who had ecclesiastical jurisdiction, for the restoration and constant practice of the old popish observances. This royal lady did not stop here. A committee from the convocation and the two universities, consisting of fourteen divines, was appointed to the examination and judgment of Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer ; when they were all adjudged to be obstinate heretics, degraded, excommunicated, and delivered to the secular power to be burnt.

The reader will here pause a moment, to observe the illegality, as well as the inconsistency of these measures. There was nothing which the queen so much desired, as the restoration of the ecclesiastical authority and jurisdiction to the highest point to which it had ever arrived : yet, in the instance last mentioned, as well as in many others, she counteracted this authority and jurisdiction, by as flagrant an exertion of her supremacy in the church, as her father or brother ever exercised, who avowed this supremacy. Thus, contrary to all

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 333.

precedents, and to all ecclesiastical privileges, she, of her own sovereign will and pleasure, empowered a committee of priests, without a single bishop or temporal judge among them, to try and determine a cause of the highest nature ; to examine the faith of three bishops, to convict them of heresy, to cast them out of the church, and to commit them into the hands of temporal men to be punished. Notwithstanding this absurdity and wickedness, her flaming zeal for the old religion atoned for all ; and she stuck at nothing that would enable her to crush the reformation.

From this detail of facts, it is extremely manifest, that an absolute supremacy over men's understandings and consciences, might be extremely prejudicial to religion. For, as king Henry and his son Edward reformed by their supremacy some enormities in the church, against the majority of the people ; so queen Mary by the same power turned things into the old channel : whatever this power enabled them to do, it enabled her to undo. By her royal proclamations and orders of council, she destroyed the reformation ; and, having at length procured the consent of parliament, she restored the whole body and soul of popery. Such is the folly and absurdity of allowing the title and power of supreme head of the church, to any one excepting Jesus Christ ; who is the only king, the only lawgiver, the only judge, the only saviour in his church.

The prospect of the queen's marriage with Philip of Spain, gave general discontent ; and all who had espoused the reformation with grief anticipated, not only a change of religion, but the erection of a Spanish government and inquisition. Those who valued the *civil* liberty of their country, without any concern for religion, concluded that England would become a province of Spain ; and they beheld how the Spaniards ruled in the Netherlands, in Milan, Naples, and Sicily : but, above all, they heard of their unexampled inhumanities in the West Indies.*

The queen's marriage being consummated, the court renewed and greatly increased its oppressions. Orders were given to imprison all who did not attend upon divine service as now appointed ; and many persons lost their ears, and were

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 268.

put in the pillory, for speaking too freely of these tyrannical proceedings. Bonner was commanded to reduce the people to the old religion, in which reduction he knew of no other method than severity. The articles of inquiry in his visitation related generally to the suppression of heresy, the marriage of the clergy, and the restoration and observance of the old superstitious ceremonies. His grace was violently passionate, and he proceeded in some instances to swearing, abusing, and even striking, the clergy; insomuch that the dean of St. Paul's, who accompanied him, found it necessary to apologize, that the bishop's long imprisonment had made him passionate: to which a gentleman shrewdly answered, that now he was taken out of prison, he ought to be sent to Bedlam.*

The two former parliaments had restored all ecclesiastical matters to the state in which they were left at the death of Henry; and this was all the queen at first pretended. But now that the royal marriage was consummated, and the government had all things at command, her majesty's bigotry broke loose; and her unrighteous spirit could not be satisfied without a total reconciliation with Rome. To this purpose she summoned another parliament; in the writs of which, her title, as supreme head of the church, was omitted, though it was still by law united to the crown, the power of which she had till this time in the highest degree assumed. Her majesty had never been more solicitous about any thing, than to procure this parliament to her mind; and by using her utmost efforts, her wishes were realized.

The queen wrote to the pope assuring him of her submission, with that of her dominions, to the holy see; and nothing could exceed the joy manifested at Rome, as soon as her majesty's intentions were known. Public rejoicings were observed for three successive days; when even his holiness officiated at mass, and distributed "a profusion of indulgences."† Cardinal Pole, as the pope's legate, was accordingly sent to England. Being invested with all-sufficient power from his holiness, he had upon his arrival first a private audience of the king and queen, and, after two days, went to the parliament house. Their majesties sitting under a canopy, and the lords

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 290.

† Custance, p. 221.

and commons being present, the lord chancellor Gardiner, acquainted them with the character and business of the cardinal, and hoped they would follow the good example of the king and queen, by a similar reception of him according to his high official character. After this introduction, Pole himself stood up, and made a long speech to both houses; acquainting them with his commission from his holiness, to restore the nation, which had strayed from the sacred inclosure, to its ancient and true nobility, and to a reconciliation with holy church. In the conclusion, the two houses, without the least sense of religion, or else blinded with Spanish gold, approved and agreed to the offered reconciliation. Their address was presented to the king and queen by the lords and commons on their knees; beseeching their majesties, who had not been defiled by their schism, to be intercessors with the legate of the holy see, that he would grant them and the kingdom an absolution from the sins of schism and heresy into which they had fallen, and receive them again into the bosom of the church. If an English parliament could so degrade its spirit and understanding, as to make this mean and weak submission to an ideal power, we may be sure the request was not made in vain; for Pole, after a pompous harangue on the danger of separation from the holy communion of mother church, gave them on their bended knees a full absolution, for themselves and the whole nation, and England was restored again to the unity of holy catholic church. The solemn farce being performed, and the absolution pronounced, they went to the royal chapel in pompous procession, where they sung *Te Deum*; and the whole day was spent in rejoicing. This is an event in English history which rouses our indignation at the little share of sense, or courage, or integrity, which our ancestors possessed; and it cannot be read without concluding, that the majority of the lords and commons, turning at the pleasure of a female bigot, were absolutely void of judgment and religion.* Thus England was dragged in royal chains again to the religion of Rome.

The cardinal having restored the kingdom to its ancient relations, the parliament sent to the pope to confirm what his

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 89—92.—Warner, vol. ii. p. 356—359.

legate had done; and in the meantime an act was passed, repealing all the statutes against the see of Rome, made in the last two reigns. In this act was inserted and ratified the legate's agreement; also that the title of supreme head never legally belonged to the crown; yet that all those writings in which it had been used should continue still in force, as well as all those in which it had been or should be omitted. This act being finished, a bill was passed to revive all the statutes against heretics; and a report having been made, that some heretical person had prayed, "that God would turn the queen's heart from idolatry, or else shorten her days," another act was sent to the lords, who read it three times and passed it, on the day on which the parliament was dissolved, adjudging those who prayed thus to be condemned as traitors; yet in case they showed themselves penitent, they were not to be punished with death, but in some other way at the discretion of the judge.*

The terrific hierarchy being erected, the queen and her ministers next deliberated on the fittest means to be adopted for the extirpation of heresy. The protestants were supposed to be much more numerous than the catholics; but they were destitute of all support, while their adversaries had the government, with all its destructive engines, in their hands. Cardinal Pole had been formerly suspected of showing too much favour to protestants; and though he took care to avoid all occasions of censure on that ground in future, yet, being a man of a generous disposition, he delivered his sentiments in the council without hesitation on the side of moderation. The bishops, he said, who were fathers, should look on those who erred as their sick children, and, on that account, show them tenderness and compassion, and not destroy them; and that violence was not only inconsistent with their character, but commonly inflamed and propagated the distemper, instead of curing it. In the conclusion, he added, that as the ignorance and scandals of ecclesiastics had given rise to heresy in every nation of Christendom, they should begin with a reformation of the clergy, by reviving the rules of the primitive church; then the people might be won without force. This was the Christian and tolerant advice of the popish cardinal, the observance

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 296.

of which would have been no disgrace to protestants in later times.

In opposition to this prudent and salutary counsel, bishop Gardiner, who, not being remarkable for candour and honesty,* had no deep sense of the affairs of religion, only as they were subservient to the intrigues of the state, and being himself of an abject vindictive temper, proposed reviving the statutes against lollardy, which carried all the terrors of fire and fagot, as the best expedients of restoring popery. Judging of others no doubt by himself, he was confident, he said, that if the preachers then in prison found they must of necessity recant or burn, they would certainly choose the former in preference to the latter: or if any of them were so obstinate as to suffer, the whole nation would soon be *terrified* into submission, and return to the bosom of the church. He reminded the court how the Lollards increased, upon Wolsey's slackening the rigour of the laws; and that if the statute of Henry IV. had been executed with firmness, he was sure there would not have been a single heretic now in the kingdom.

If the sober advice of Pole was becoming a man of candour and clemency, the opinion of Gardiner was as much in character: not indeed of a Christian prelate, but of a man of cruelty—a servile courtier, whose only concern was an outward submission to the religion of the state. It is easy enough to conclude, which of these sage counsels the peevish temper of the queen would most admire. She, indeed, encouraged Pole in the design of reforming the manners of the clergy, in which she promised her royal assistance; but she pressed Gardiner to proceed with all imaginable severity against heretics.†

This prelate stood in no need of goading to pursue those measures which his own temper and resentment dictated. In conformity, therefore, to the views and wishes of the queen, he cheerfully undertook to put the penal laws in execution, when above fourscore heretics, who had been imprisoned nearly eighteen months till an act could be conveniently passed against them, were convened before him: not to answer for any crimes, because they were not guilty of any, but to be wrought upon by promises and threatenings to renounce their faith. The

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 267.

† Ibid. 299.

prelate tried in vain, except in two solitary instances ; and the experiment proving ineffectual, the rest were returned to prison. The council, finding the good people unmoved, proceeded to much greater lengths of severity, and wreaked their vengeance on several of the most popular and obnoxious preachers, according to the plan which Gardiner had recommended.

This old, cunning prelate was, however, mistaken in his politics. He expected, as he had declared, that the execution of a few, would strike terror into all the rest ; but, to his great mortification and disappointment, the wretched experiment being tried, the event was found to be perfectly the reverse. The fire and the fagot were found to be no fit weapons to convert heretics to popery. Those who fell a sacrifice rejoiced and triumphed in the flames, and the faith and confidence of the rest were not lessened, but greatly increased. Gardiner, therefore, under extreme vexation, resolved to be no more concerned in these trials, but committed the bloody work to Bonner, whose savage temper delighted in it. These shocking proceedings excited universal sympathy for the sufferers, and disgust at the barbarous prelates. The bishops at length, indeed, became ashamed of their own disgraceful transactions, and endeavoured to purge themselves in open court, by charging their proceedings upon the queen. Her majesty had declared at her accession, as we have already stated, that she would not force her religion upon her subjects ; therefore, as it was thought indecent to charge the severities upon her, it was said the fires were kindled by the peevish and bigoted king. The king was unwilling to bear the slanderous imputation, and resolved not to be the dupe of the bishops, who attempted to clear themselves at the expense of his reputation ; so that, through the medium of his confessor, he publicly charged the bishops with the barbarous cruelties complained of by the people : which, he said, they had not learned from the Scriptures ; where bishops were taught to instruct in the spirit of meekness those who opposed them, and not to burn them for their conscientious scruples. Thus the bishops were again vexed and confounded, and forced to bear the blame of spilling the blood of the saints.*

This is a faint, but a true picture of the treachery and into-

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 305.—Warner, vol. ii. p. 363—370.

lerance of Mary's bloody reign. Through the various progressive stages, the reader will clearly behold the nation retracing her ancient slavery, till the whole was consummated by England's total subjection to the papal despotism. The popish hierarchy was now re-erected, with all its former terrors, and a perfect reconciliation and alliance formed with the man of sin. The rights of private judgment and of conscience, though sacred and unalienable, were banished from the shores of Britain; and Englishmen were not permitted to think and believe for themselves, in any of those concerns pertaining to the worship of God and the salvation of their souls. All the inhabitants of the land, but especially the clergy, were bound, under the most shocking penalties, to receive the religion of the state; and a most extraordinary tribunal, partly civil and partly ecclesiastical, was erected, to destroy the lives and souls of all who could not in conscience conform to the national faith and worship. These are glaring facts, detailed at length on the page of history; but it is not intended to conduct the reader through rivers of blood, shed by the merciless prelates, who so awfully disgraced the reign of queen Mary.

SECTION II.

The noble Defence of Christian Truth and Liberty.

THE patience and constancy of the saints, formed a very conspicuous feature in the character of these melancholy times. These excellent Christian qualities shone with resplendent brilliancy, in almost numberless instances of extreme torture, and raised in the highest degree the reputation of the sufferers; while the tortures inflicted upon the innocent, stamped indelible infamy on the name and character of the opposite party. Logical arguments are not the only weapons employed in the Christian warfare. By humble piety and religious practice, men reflect the greatest honour on the Redeemer, and best promote the prosperity of his kingdom: so the honourable army of martyrs, in their defences before the tribunals of their enemies, and by their wonderful piety and magnanimity at the

stake, made the noblest stand against the encroachment of arbitrary power, and the most glorious defence of the truth and liberty of the Gospel—a defence which will never be forgotten by persons of humane and Christian feelings. They obtained the conquest when they fell; though they lost their lives, they gained the victory when they breathed their last.

The protestant bishops and divines having lain a long time in their respective prisons, subscribed a declaration of their faith, that all might know their religious opinions. They also presented their humble supplication to the king and queen, and the two houses of parliament, for liberty to prove their innocence, in the presence of such impartial judges as their majesties should appoint.* Their equitable suit and generous proposals, however, were rejected. Their cause was not allowed to appear in the light of day; but they must be condemned without trial before an unbiassed tribunal. It will be necessary, therefore, to record a few instances of the pious intrepidity with which, in their dying moments, they withstood the tyrannizing ecclesiastics, defended the rights of conscience, and outbraved the dreadful storm.

We shall begin with the celebrated John Rogers, the proto-martyr—a zealous and learned preacher. Being convened before the council, he was asked whether he would unite himself to the catholic church, and acknowledge the pope to be supreme head; he replied, that he knew of *no other head* of the church besides Jesus Christ, and that, from Scripture or antiquity, the pope had no more authority than any other bishop. When his unshaken firmness was stigmatized vain glory, he protested against it, and declared, it was *conscience only*, which kept him from uniting with the antichristian church.

In his defence, Mr. Rogers declares—“ That all the laws of men may not and cannot rule the word of God, but they must all be discussed and judged thereby: neither my conscience, nor any Christian’s conscience, can be satisfied with such laws as disagree with that Word. That which we affirmed and preached as the true doctrine in king Edward’s days, you now cry against as most abominable heresy. This fault, I trust, you shall never find at our hands.

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 82, 97.

“ It is not only lawful for a man, who bringeth the authority of God’s word and the antiquity of the primitive church, to speak and write against such unlawful things ; but it is his *duty*, and he is *bound* in very conscience to do it. This I prove by what is written in the Acts, where the high-priests, elders, scribes and pharisees, decreed in their council, and commanded the apostles, that they should not preach in the name of Christ, as you have forbidden us : notwithstanding they answered, *We ought to obey God rather than men*. Even so we may and do answer you. God is more to be obeyed than men ; and your wicked laws cannot tie our tongues, but we will speak the truth.

“ The apostles were beaten for their boldness ; and they rejoiced that they suffered for the cause of Christ. You have provided rods and whips for us : yet when you have done what God’s hand and counsel hath determined to be done, be it life or death, I trust that God will so assist us by his Holy Spirit and grace, that we shall patiently suffer it, and bless God for it. Whatsoever may become of me and others, who now suffer for speaking and professing the truth, be ye assured, that God’s word will prevail, when your bloody laws and wicked decrees, for want of foundation, shall fall in the dust. The same may be said of the general councils within these five hundred years, where the Roman antichrist, by reason of his usurped authority, has decreed such things as made for his gain, not regarding the glory of God. They are, therefore, to be spoken, written, and cried aloud against, by all such as fear God and love his truth.”

On the morning of Mr. Rogers’ execution, being asked by the sheriff whether he would revoke his abominable doctrine, he said, “ That which I have preached I will seal with my blood.” “ Then,” said the sheriff, “ thou art a heretic.” “ That shall be known,” replied he, “ at the day of judgment.” “ Well, I will never pray for thee,” said the sheriff. “ But I will pray for you,” said Mr. Rogers ; and then he was conveyed from Newgate to Smithfield. When fastened to the stake, a pardon was offered him if he would recant ; but he absolutely refused, preferring a short suffering with a good conscience, to the risk of everlasting torments by falling into wilful apostacy. He therefore exhorted the people to continue steadfast in that faith which he was about to seal with his blood ; and, with won-

derful constancy and triumph, he was burnt to ashes, in the presence of an immense concourse of spectators.*

Lawrence Sanders, an excellent preacher at Coventry, having been a long time in prison, addressed a letter to bishop Gardiner, in which he said—"As to my religion, I say with St. Paul: 'That after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets; and have hope towards God. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.' So that I call God to witness that I have a conscience; and this my conscience is not grounded upon vain fancy, but upon the infallible truth of God's word, with the witness of his chosen church agreeable to it.

"The Romish religion robs God of his due honour. It takes away the true comfort of conscience, by obscuring or rather burying Christ and his office of salvation. It spoils God of his true worship in spirit and truth, appointed in his pre-script commandments; and drives men to that inconvenience, against which Christ and the prophets speak with sharpness: 'This people honoureth me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.' 'In vain ye do worship me, teaching the doctrines and commandments of men.' 'Ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.' Wherefore, by conscientiously weighing and indifferently discussing the Romish religion, I find the foundation unstable, and the building upon it only vain. On the other hand, having my conscience framed by a right and uncorrupt religion, fully ratified and established by the word of God, and the consent of his true church, I neither may, nor do intend, by God's gracious assistance, to be pulled one jot from it, though an angel from heaven should preach another Gospel than that which I have received of the Lord."

Mr. Sanders being under examination before his judges, said—"One of these two extreme perils are likely to fall upon me: the losing of a good conscience, or the losing of my life. I tell you the truth, I love both life and liberty, if I could enjoy them without the hurt of my conscience." "Con-

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 104, 108.

science!" replied bishop Gardiner, "you have none, but pride and arrogance, dividing yourselves by singularity from the church." "The Lord knows all men's consciences," answered Sanders; "and wherein your lordship charges me with dividing myself from the church, I do assure you, that I live in the faith in which I have been brought up ever since I was fourteen years old; being taught that the power of the bishop of Rome was usurped, with many other evils springing from it. Yea, this I have received from you who are here present, as a thing agreed upon by the catholic church and public authority. A man may live though he lack an arm, hand, or joint; but he cannot live without his head: but you, and the whole of you, have agreed to cut off the supremacy of the bishop of Rome, whom now you will have to be again the head of the church." The bishop said, "You are obstinate, and refuse your liberty." "My lord," replied Sanders, "I may not purchase liberty at such a price; but I beseech your honours to be a means to the queen's majesty for such a pardon of us, that we may live and keep our consciences unclogged, and we shall live as most obedient subjects: otherwise, I will by God's grace abide the worst extremity against me, rather than do any thing against my conscience." His firmness and his comfort remained unshaken to the last; and when he was carried to the place of execution, he fell on the ground, and prayed; and rising from his knees, he clasped the stake in his arms, and kissed it, exclaiming: "Welcome the cross of Christ; welcome everlasting life," and was presently consumed to ashes.*

The celebrated bishop Hooper comes next in the noble army of martyrs; who, when he was importuned to recant and save his life, said—"True it is, that death is bitter, and life is sweet; but, alas! the death to come is more bitter, and the life to come is more sweet. For the desire and love I have to the one, and the terror and fear of the other, therefore, I do not much regard this death, nor esteem this life, but have settled myself, through the strength of God's Holy Spirit, patiently to endure the torments and extremities of the fire now prepared for me, rather than deny the truth of his word."

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 110—115.

In one of his letters directed to Bullinger, not long before his death, he says—"With us, the wound that antichrist has received is healed; and he is declared head of the church, who is not a member of it. We are still in the utmost peril, as we have been for a year and a half: we are kept asunder in prison, and treated with all kinds of inhumanity and scorn. They threaten us every day with death, which we do not value. We resolutely despise fire and sword, for the cause of Christ. We know in whom we have believed, and are sure that we have committed our souls to him in well-doing. In the meantime, help us with your prayers, that he that has begun the good work in us, will perform it to the end. We are the Lord's, let him do with us as seemeth good in his sight."

Hooper being led to the place of execution, the queen's pardon was showed him, if he would recant; but he desired them to take it away. Having no leave to speak otherwise than in his devotion, he declared his faith in the form of a prayer, and earnestly cried to the Lord for strength to bear patiently the torments of the fire. His extreme anguish in the fire lasted about three quarters of an hour; during which, he prayed: "O, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon me, and receive my soul," desiring to have more fire. At length he cried more audibly, "Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me! Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me! Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;" and then with heroic triumph breathed his last.*

Ridley and Latimer were burnt at the same stake. They were carried from their prisons to a *mock* disputation at Oxford; on which occasion, Ridley delivered his protestation in these words:—"I have determined to declare openly my mind, and to confess plainly in those things which you demand. I have in *times past thought otherwise* than I now do; yet, I call God to record to my soul that I lie not, I have not altered my judgment, either by constraint of man, or through the dread of any danger, or in hope of any commodity; but only for the love of the truth revealed to me by the grace of God. I will not wittingly speak in any point against the word of God, or dissent in any one jot from it, or from the rules of faith; which rules that same most sacred word prescribeth to the church of

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 126, 127.

Christ, to which I now and for ever submit myself, and all my doings."

Old father Latimer was introduced to this ridiculous disputation, like a primitive martyr, in his prison attire. He had a cap upon his head, buttoned under his chin, a pair of spectacles hanging at his breast, a New Testament under his arm, and a staff in his hand. The arrangements of the disputation being announced to him, he signified that he was very old and very infirm; and shaking his palsied head, he smiled and said—"Indeed, gentlemen, I am just as well qualified to be made governor of Calais, as engage in a public dispute." He told them, that he had the use of no other book besides that under his arm; which he had read over deliberately seven times, without finding the least mention of the mass; and then added, in his humorous style, that he could find neither "the marrow-bones, nor the sinews of the mass in the New Testament."*

When the two prisoners were carried to the stake, they embraced each other with much affection; and Ridley, with an air of pleasure, said to Latimer, "Be of good heart brother, for God will either assuage the fury of the flame, or else enable us to abide it." Being chained to the stake, and the fagots being lighted, Latimer said to his companion, "Be of good comfort and play the man: we shall by the grace of God this day light a candle in England, which I trust will never be put out." As the fire approached, Ridley cried—"Into thy hand, Lord, I commit my spirit: Lord, receive my spirit:" and Latimer cried, "Oh, Father of heaven, receive my soul." The two triumphant heroes then entered into the joy of their Lord.†

Archbishop Cranmer having received the sentence of condemnation, drew up in writing an appeal from the sentence of the pope, to the next general council. "Although the bishop of Rome," said he, "whom they call Pope, standeth in the room of Christ, and hath authority of God; yet by that power or authority he is not become sinless, neither hath he received that power to destroy, but to edify the congregation. Therefore if he shall command any thing that is not right, he ought to take it patiently, and in good part, in case he be not obey

* Gilpin, vol. i. p. 484.

† Fox, vol. iii. p. 51, 429, 430.

ed. And he must not be obeyed, if he command any thing against the precepts of God: no, he may be lawfully resisted, even as Paul withstood Peter." These are honourable and heroic sentiments, though directly opposed to Cranmer's own practice in the late reign: but it was a great mercy that he became conscious of his former errors; that he renounced his persecuting principles; and that he imbibed the tolerant and amiable spirit of the Gospel.

The primate addressed a letter to queen Mary, not long before his death, in which he assigned his reasons for refusing submission to the pope's authority. "Forasmuch," said he, "as in the time of king Henry VIII., your grace's most royal father, I was sworn never to consent, that the bishop of Rome should have or exercise any authority or jurisdiction in this realm of England; therefore lest I should allow his authority contrary to my own oath, and so be guilty of perjury, I refused to answer the bishop of Gloucester, sitting in judgment by the pope's authority. Another cause of refusing his authority, is, that the authority which he claimeth is repugnant to the laws and imperial crown of this realm; which every true subject is bound to defend. The laws and imperial crown of this realm, the king in his coronation, and all justices when they receive their offices, are sworn, and the whole realm is bound to maintain and defend. But contrary to this, the pope by his authority maketh void, and commandeth us to blot out of our books, all laws and customs that are repugnant to his laws; and he declareth *cursed* all rulers and governors, and all makers and executors of all such laws or customs. If the bishop of Rome's authority, which he claims from God, be lawful, all your grace's laws and customs in your realm, being contrary to the pope's laws, are naught; and, as well your majesty, as your judges, justices, and all executioners of the laws, stand accursed among heretics: which God forbid. Yet, if the pope have the power which he claims, this curse cannot be avoided, until the laws and customs of this realm which are contrary to his laws, be taken away and blotted out of the statute book."*

Cranmer's letter to the queen was of no more avail than his

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 556, 563.

appeal from the pope; and by the terrors of his enemies he was frightened into a recantation, but by the terrors of his conscience he was presently frightened to repentance. The archbishop appearing before the public congregation at Oxford, just before his execution, and being permitted to speak, he addressed them in these words:—"It is now, my brethren, no time to dissemble. I stand upon the verge of life: a vast eternity is before me. What are my fears, or what my hopes, it matters not here to unfold. For one action of my life at least I am accountable to the world;—my late shameful subscription to opinions, which are *wholly opposite to my real sentiments*. Before this congregation I solemnly declare, that the fear of death alone induced me to this ignominious action; that it hath cost me many bitter tears; and that in my heart I totally reject the pope, and the doctrines of the church of Rome."* Upon this, the venerable primate was immediately dragged into the street, and barbarously hurried to the stake. When the fire began to burn, as he had declared in the presence of his enemies, he stretched out his *right hand* into the flame, by which he had subscribed his recantation. He oftentimes said, "this unworthy hand," till it was burnt off; and then gave up the ghost, saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."†

These great Reformers carried their principles with them to the stake, and displayed the greatest constancy and magnanimity in resisting the cruel encroachments and oppressions of popery. They fell in the great struggle; but they vanquished their enemies, and, by their invincible courage and piety, aided by the grace of God, they have transmitted to posterity the noblest defence of the doctrines and liberties of Christians—a defence written in characters of blood. These heroic saints, with all the other martyrs, were conscious of their rights and obligations in the sight of God, in all things pertaining to Christian worship and the salvation of their souls; therefore they cheerfully sacrificed their lives, rather than tamely surrender the rights of conscience to ecclesiastical usurpers, or renounce their allegiance to their Creator, in slavish subjection to the despotic power of any creature. As

* Gilpin, vol. ii. p. 161.

† Fox, vol. iii. p. 561—563.

they were, by the help of heaven, the most valiant champions for the claims of conscience, and the prerogative of God ; so their principles and practice will be admired and revered, by all persons of real worth, to the end of the world. These valiant soldiers of Jesus Christ appreciated and claimed religion as matter of individual right. They concluded, that, if *every one* must give an account of *himself* to God, religion is a concern between God and the soul ; and that men are amenable to his authority *alone*, for the sentiments which they hold, and for the modes of worship which they adopt. He has not empowered any single person, or any collective body, to be an infallible interpreter of his will. The revelation he has given addresses itself to the reason and conscience of every individual ; and “ to his own Master,” who is in heaven, “ he standeth or falleth.”

We see, from the foregoing events, that chains cannot fetter the thoughts of man, or force detain them. The conscience is wholly uncontrolled by the tortures which may agonize and consume the body. The flames of martyrdom form only the chariot to the triumphing spirit. The utmost intolerance of man only places his victim absolutely and eternally beyond his jurisdiction : it can have no effect upon that imperishable principle which He alone who created can control ; which none but itself could make miserable—none but God can make happy. The truth of these important maxims was displayed by the most indubitable evidence derived from almost innumerable facts, known to all who lived in this reign ; yet those who inflicted these barbarities, and even their immediate posterity, seemed to derive very little instruction from them.

The right of individual judgment and practice, in concerns of a religious character, was for ages denied to the unhappy subjects of the Roman polity. Infallibility was claimed for the decisions of the church ; and whoever ventured to controvert positions which were thus sanctioned and promulgated, was declared unfit to live, and incapable of salvation. The domineering church, alas ! was “ drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.” Who can think of the persecutions which have been instigated by this antichristian community, without feelings of the greatest horror ? Who can call to recollection the fires of Smithfield

without shuddering? And why were those fires kindled? Because these heroic Christians dared “to obey God rather than men:”—because they exercised the unalienable right which their Creator and Redeemer had given them:—because they yielded to the directions of Scripture, and the suggestions of their consciences, on subjects of everlasting importance.

In this great conflict, even the princess Elizabeth had no inconsiderable share, and very narrowly escaped the fire. She was conducted from prison to prison, and at length lodged in the tower, when the warrant signed by the council was sent for her execution; but the diabolical attempt was overruled, and her life spared.*

Intolerance is equally inconsistent and ridiculous, as it is opposed to Christianity and the rights of human nature. This was manifest in the case of Martin Bucer and Paul Fagius. These two German divines, celebrated for literature and piety, had been invited in the reign of king Edward to assist the reformation in this country, and had now been dead several years; but, marvellous as it may seem, they were both cited before the ecclesiastical judges to give an account of their faith; and the dead men not rising from their graves to answer the interrogatories of the court, the sentence of condemnation was pronounced upon them as obstinate heretics!! To complete the ridiculous solemnity, the bones of the deceased offenders were dug out of their peaceful graves, delivered to the secular power to be punished, and conveyed, under a strong guard, to the place of execution; when the coffins were fast chained to two stakes, and their contents consumed to ashes!! At the same time, these reverend gentlemen dug up the body of Peter Martyr’s wife, who had been a celebrated matron of piety and charity, and who was supposed to have been of the same religion as her husband. Witnesses were produced and sworn to answer such questions as they should propose concerning the dead woman; but, since she was a foreigner, no one knew what was her religion, they could not proceed against her for the sin of heresy; therefore, her body was cast out of the church with scorn, and buried in a dunghill. There it remained in its peaceful abode till after the accession of Eliza-

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 797.

beth; when, by the appointment of archbishop Parker, bishop Grindal and others, it was taken up, and laid in the grave of St. Frideswide, and mixed with his relics, that in case any one hereafter should be so mad as to remove her bones, they might not be able to distinguish them from those of the popish saint.*

The infatuated queen and her ministers, enraged to hear from all quarters that the number of protestants continually increased, not only encouraged the magistrates in the persecution of heretics, but resolved to erect an *inquisition* in England, similar to that in Spain. To this end, a commission was granted to a certain number of favourites of the court, investing them with an unlimited power in the trial of heretics; so that they were authorized to proceed according to their own discretion, no person whatever being exempt from their jurisdiction. This iniquitous measure was followed by renewed persecution, in which multitudes of protestants were sacrificed to popish barbarity.†

Since the sacred light of the reformation had, in the late reign, been more diffusive in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, than in most parts of the kingdom, the queen sent her commissioners into those parts to reclaim the people from their apostacy, and bring them back to the mother church. The inhabitants of these counties, who had greatly assisted her majesty's accession, and being firmly established in the truth and liberty of the Gospel, presented the following humble supplication to the queen and her commissioners:

“ We most humbly pray and beseech the queen's gracious majesty, to have mercy and pity upon us her poor and faithful subjects, and not to compel us to do that which is against our consciences, and will so incurably wound our hearts, by bringing into the church the Latin mass and service that edifies us not, and casting out Christ's holy communion and English service, so causing us to sin against our redemption. For such as do this wittingly against their consciences, are in a miserable state, until the mercy of God turn them; and if he do not, we certainly believe they will be eternally damned: and, as in this world they deny Christ's holy word and communion before men, so will Christ deny them before his hea-

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 645, 653.—Burnet, vol. ii. p. 346.

† Ibid. p. 347.

venly Father and his holy angels. God be merciful unto us, and move the queen's majesty's heart, and the hearts of her honourable council, and your hearts, right honourable commissioners, to weigh these dangers in due time ; and to call God's word into your council, then you will see how it agrees with this bishop-like commandment ; and to be as wary to avoid the contempt and dangers of the eternal God, as you are prudent and wise in matters of this world ; lest, if the Almighty be contemned, he stretch forth his arm which no man can turn, and kindle his wrath which no man can quench.

“ We have humbly opened to your consciences, no doubt sorely wounded and grieved by this commandment ; and we meekly pray and beseech the queen's majesty, for the precious death and blood-shedding of Jesus Christ our Saviour, to have mercy and pity upon us her grace's poor commons, faithful and true subjects, members of the same body politic, of which her grace is supreme head. All our bodies, goods, lands, and lives, are ready to do her grace faithful obedience, and true service in all things that are not against God and his word : but in things that import a denial of Christ, and refusal of his word and holy communion, we cannot give our consent or agreement. For we have bound ourselves in baptism to be Christ's disciples, and to keep his holy word and ordinances. If we deny him before men, he will deny us before God's tribunal in the day of judgment : this, we trust, her benign grace will not require of us. And we humbly beseech her majesty, that we may not be enforced to it ; but, as we serve her grace with body and goods, and due obedience, according to God's commandment ; so we may be permitted freely to serve God and Christ our Saviour, and devote unto him our souls, which he hath redeemed with his precious blood ; that, as Christ teaches we may render to Cæsar that which is Cæsar's, and to God that which is God's !”*

From this admirable petition we clearly perceive, that notwithstanding all the barbarous persecution of this reign, the light of the reformation could not be totally extinguished, or the heroic defence of the rights of conscience, be entirely destroyed. Great numbers, indeed, were driven to seek their

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 578—582.

bread in foreign lands, and multitudes were committed to the flames ; yet many, who loved the doctrines and blessings of the Gospel more than their lives, withstood the cruel oppressions, and endured the dreadful storm. These excellent Christians withdrew from the national church, and formed themselves, after the primitive model, into separate congregations in various parts of the kingdom. A considerable congregation was formed at Stoke in Suffolk ; where the word and ordinances of Christ were statedly ministered, and their peace and prosperity greatly promoted. The watchful eyes of the prelates were upon them ; but, on account of their number and unanimity, their lordships were for some time afraid to interfere. They constantly attended their meetings for divine worship, and conscientiously scrupled the worship of the parish churches.

This pious and zealous congregation having assembled for several years, an order was at length sent to the whole society, requiring them to receive the popish mass within sixteen days after Easter, or abide the perilous consequences that would follow. The good people, upon this, assembled for the purpose of consultation, and they firmly resolved not to comply. In about six months, the bishop of Norwich sent his officers, strictly commanding them to attend the public service of the church on the following Lord's day ; and, in case of refusal, requiring them to appear before the commissary, to give an account of their conduct : but having notice of this, they kept out of the way to avoid the summons. When they neither went to church, nor appeared before the commissary, the angry prelate suspended and excommunicated the whole of the congregation. And when officers were appointed to apprehend them, they, being resolved to maintain their liberty, left the town ; and so escaped all the days of queen Mary.*

There were at least two of these congregations which met in and about the city of London ; but owing to the vigilance of their enemies, they were obliged to use the utmost secrecy when they assembled. One of these religious societies had Mr. Thomas Rose for its minister. He was a famous preacher early in the reign of king Henry, when he endured much se-

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 773.

vere persecution; and on the death of king Edward, he was driven from his charge, and again in danger of his life. He now united himself to one of the congregations of separatists in London, and was chosen to the pastoral office. To preserve themselves against the unceasing watchfulness of the bishops, they assembled in the most secret places, and in the dead of the night. Mr. Rose was generously entertained by lady Vane, during his pastoral care of these good people; and though he oftentimes narrowly escaped the discovery of his enemies, he was at length betrayed by an unworthy brother, when he and upwards of thirty of his congregation were apprehended in the act of receiving the Lord's supper, at a house in Bow-church yard, and the same night committed to prison.

Mr. Rose being carried before bishop Gardiner, his lordship said, "I have long looked for thee, and at length have caught thee. I will know who are thy maintainers, or else I will make thee a foot longer." "My lord," said Mr. Rose, "you shall do as much as pleaseth God, and no more; yet the law is in your hand: I have God for my maintainer, and none other." The examination being closed, he was sent to the tower; and having remained some time, he was conveyed to Norwich, where he underwent several examinations in the presence of the bishop and his officers. The bishop said, "You are sent to me to be examined: will you submit yourself to the order of the church of England?" "My lord," replied he, "I trust I am not out of the order of Christ's church in England, neither do I know myself an offender against it." His lordship said, "If you will be accounted an Englishman, you must submit yourself." "My lord," replied Mr. Rose, "I am an Englishman born, and do most humbly require of the Christian congregation of England, to be counted a particular member of it: and with all due reverence submit myself as in the form and manner following: That whatsoever laws shall be set forth in the church for the establishment of Christ's true religion, I will not only hold and believe them, but also most reverently obey them." "Ah, Sirrah," said the bishop, "you will admit nothing but *Scripture*." "No truly, my lord," replied the other, "I admit nothing but Scripture in the *government of the soul*. For faith cometh by hearing, and hear-

ing by the word of God: and where the word of God is not, there ought to be no belief." Mr. Rose having made this heroic defence of his principles and practice, against the sentiments and oppressions of his adversaries, was released from bondage; and, to escape the outrage of those who still thirsted for his blood, he went into exile, where he continued till the death of queen Mary. On the accession of Elizabeth, he returned to his native country, and lived many years at Luton in Bedfordshire.*

We have not been able to learn what became of his congregation; but it was most probably broken up and dispersed. There was also another congregation of separatists, which secretly assembled in the metropolis and its vicinity; and though it appears to have been more numerous than the former, having about two hundred members, it remained for a considerable time undiscovered. The meetings of these good people were held alternately in Aldgate, Blackfriars, Pudding-lane, Thames-street, and in ships on the river. Sometimes they assembled in the villages about London, especially at Islington, that they might the more effectually elude the bishops' officers. To screen themselves from persecution, they commonly met in the night, and experienced many wonderful providential deliverances.† Their public devotions were conducted by the following ministers: Edmund Scambler, afterwards successively bishop of Peterborough and Norwich, Mr. Fowler, Mr. John Rough, Mr. Augustine Bernher, Thomas Bentham, afterwards bishop of Lichfield and Coventry, and Mr. John Pullain, afterwards an excellent puritan.

It was during the ministry of Mr. Rough that this congregation was first discovered; when he was apprehended, with Mr. Cuthbert Sympton and some others, at a house in Islington, where the church was about to assemble for prayer and preaching the word; and being taken before the council, after several examinations, he was sent to Newgate, and his case committed to the management of Bonner. In the hands of this prelate, Mr. Rough endured the most relentless cruelty. Not content with degrading him, and delivering him over to

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 783—787.

† Clark's Martyr. p. 515, 516.—Fox, vol. iii. p. 726.

the secular power, the furious prelate flew upon him, and plucked the beard from his face. And, after much barbarous usage, he was committed to the flames in Smithfield, having Margaret Mearing, a member of the congregation, for his fellow sufferer. He died strong in faith, and in joyful assurance of life eternal.* Mr. Sympson, the excellent deacon, having suffered the most shocking cruelties at the hands of Bonner, suffered in Smithfield, with Mr. Fox and Mr. Davenish, two others of the church taken at Islington. Seven more of this church were burnt in Smithfield, six at Brentford, and others died in prison.†

These were arduous and painful struggles against existing oppressions, and for the liberty of worshipping God according to the light of conscience. The pious and heroic sufferers, conscious of their unalienable rights, and their obligations to God, were willing to part with all their earthly possessions, and even with their lives, rather than renounce their allegiance to Jesus Christ. They took joyfully, not only the spoiling of their goods, but also the destruction of their lives, to preserve their consciences, knowing in themselves that they had in heaven “a better and an enduring substance.”

These tragic proceedings were not, however, without their use on the public mind. For when the people beheld the infuriated malice with which the popish rulers and bishops put so many conscientious persons to death, and the calm magnanimity with which the triumphant martyrs died for the public profession of their faith; they were constrained to an abhorrence of the old superstitions, and to view the reformed doctrines as more agreeable to humanity, reason, and revelation. At length, queen Mary terminated her inglorious reign of five years and four months, November 17, 1558, in the forty-third year of her age. But in such horror and detestation were the popish clergy generally held, on account of their enormities, that they were obliged to conceal their grief for the demise of their royal mistress, lest the populace should have been roused to avenge the innocent blood which they had shed.‡

It will be necessary, before we dismiss this reign, to take

* Fox, vol. iii. p. 722—726.

† Ibid. p. 726, 729, 732, 734.

‡ Custance, p. 253.

some notice of the numerous *refugees*, divines and others, who, having fled from the Marian persecution, preferred their religion to their country, and voluntarily encountered all the hardships of exile for the profession of their faith. These persecuted protestants retired to Frankfort, Strasburg, Zurich, Basil, Geneva, and other places; but they were most numerous at Frankfort. Their liberal sentiments on the sacramental controversy are said to have disgusted certain Lutheran Reformers, from whom they received some unkind treatment. This, however, was far from being general: and Melancthon, who was a man of great candour and moderation, brought these discontents to a better temper; by persuading them, that although the English exiles might differ from them in a few points, they were embarked with them in the same common cause of *religious liberty*, and ought certainly to be treated as brethren.*

The foreign reformed churches in general exhibited, on this occasion, an amiable proof of the spirit of their religion, and amply recompensed the kindness which many foreigners had experienced in England, during the reign of king Edward. They are said to have emulated one another in exertions to accommodate the unfortunate refugees, and endeavoured with the most affectionate solicitude to supply their wants and alleviate their sufferings. The English exiles were the most happily settled at Frankfort, a rich imperial city in Germany, which, at an early period, had embraced the reformation, and befriended protestant refugees from all other countries, as far as this could be done without an open breach with the emperor, by whom their conduct was watched with a jealous eye. There was already a church of French protestants in that city.

On July 14, 1554, the English exiles obtained of the magistrates the joint use of the place of worship allotted to the French, with liberty to perform religious worship in their own language. This was granted on condition, of their conforming as nearly as possible to the doctrine and worship of the French church, to prevent all occasion of dissension. The offer was gratefully accepted by the English, who came to an unanimous agreement, that they would omit the use of the

* Gilpin, vol. ii. p. 147.

surplice, the litany, the audible responses, and some other ceremonies prescribed by the English liturgy ; which “ in those reformed churches would seem more than strange,” and were deemed “ superstitious and superfluous.” Having settled these points in the most harmonious manner, and elected a temporary pastor and deacons, and agreed upon certain regulations for discipline, they addressed letters to their brethren who had fled to other places, informing them of the agreeable settlement which they had obtained, and inviting them to participate with them in their happy accommodations at Frankfort.

The members of the new congregation having taken these prudential steps, by mutual agreement among themselves, as well as in exact conformity to the grant of the magistrates, their agreement was soon after violated, and the peace of the congregation broken, in the most wanton and scandalous manner, by Dr. Richard Cox and some other exiles, who now arrived from England. The first day that they attended public worship after their arrival, they broke through the established order, and interrupted the public service, by answering aloud after the minister. Being admonished by some of the elders to refrain from that practice, they insolently replied, “ That they would do as they had done in England, and that they would have the face of an English church !” On the following Sabbath, one of their number having obtruded himself into the pulpit, without the consent of the congregation, read the litany, while Cox and his accomplices echoed the responses.

This behaviour was considered so great an insult upon the whole body, and so manifest an outrage upon all order and decency, as could not be passed over in silence ; therefore, it being Mr. Knox’s turn to preach in the afternoon of the same Lord’s day, he accused the disorderly brethren of a flagrant violation of their solemn and unanimous agreement ; which, he said, was extremely unbecoming any of them to have attempted. Nothing which was destitute of a divine warrant ought to be obtruded upon any Christian church ; but in the English book, for which some entertained so much fondness, there were things, he said, “ imperfect, impure, and superstitious.” He adverted to the persecution of Hooper, to the want of ecclesiastical discipline, and to the well-known fact that three,

four, or five benefices had been occupied by one man, to the slander of the Gospel, and the depriving of the flock of Christ of their necessary food.

This free reprimand was highly resented by those to whom it was directed, especially by such as had held pluralities in England, who insisted that the preacher should be called to an account for having slandered the mother church. A special meeting being held for the consideration of this business, the advocates of the liturgy, instead of prosecuting their complaints against Mr. Knox, began by earnestly requesting that Dr. Cox and his friends might be admitted to vote. This was resisted by a great majority; because they had not yet subscribed the discipline of the church, nor given satisfaction for their late disorderly conduct, nor for their sinful popish compliances in England. Knox's behaviour, on this occasion, was more remarkable for magnanimity than for prudence. Although aware of their hostility against himself, and that they sought admission chiefly to overpower him by numbers, he was so confident of the justice of his cause, and so anxious to remove the prejudice of his enemies, that he entreated and prevailed with the meeting to grant this unreasonable request, and to admit them presently to vote. "I know," said he, "that your earnest desire to be received at this instant within the number of the congregation, is, that by the multitude of your voices, you may overthrow my cause. Howbeit, the matter is so evident, that you shall not be able to do it. I fear not your judgment; and therefore do require that you may be admitted."* This generous and disinterested conduct was, however, entirely lost upon the opposite party. For no sooner were they admitted, than Dr. Cox, who had no authority in the church, discharged Mr. Knox from preaching, and from all interference in the affairs of the congregation.

The great body of the congregation were indignant at these unreasonable proceedings; and there was some fear that the animosity would break out into a disgraceful tumult. To prevent this, a representation of the case was laid before the senate of Frankfort; who, having in vain recommended a private accommodation, issued an order that the congregation, accord-

* M'Crie, vol. i. p. 151.

ing to its original agreement, should conform exactly to the worship used by the French church ; and if this was not observed, they threatened to shut up their church. To this peremptory injunction the Coxian faction pretended a cheerful submission, while they clandestinely concerted measures for obtaining its revocation, and enforcing their favourite liturgy upon their brethren.

Perceiving Knox's influence in the congregation, and despairing of their object while he was among them, they determined, as their next step, to get rid of him. To accomplish this, they had recourse to one of the basest and most unchristian arts ever employed to ruin an adversary. They privately waited upon the magistrates, and accused Mr. Knox of *high treason* against the emperor of Germany, and the king and queen of England ; as founded on the following passage in his "Admonition to England," which had been published two or three years :—"O England, England, if thou obstinately wilt return into Egypt ; that is, if thou contract marriage, confederacy or league with such princes as maintain and advance idolatry ; such as the emperor (who is no less enemy to Christ than ever was Nero :) if for the pleasure of such princes thou return to thy old abominations before used under papistry, then assuredly, O England, thou shalt be plagued and brought into desolation, by the means of those whose favour thou seekest !" The magistrates having received this malicious and unnatural accusation of one whom they found to be "a learned, grave, and godly man," were extremely perplexed. On the one hand, they were satisfied of the malice of Knox's accusers ; on the other, they were afraid of the information coming to the emperor's council ; so they privately recommended him to retire of his own accord from Frankfort. Nor did they dissemble their detestation of this "cruel, outrageous and bloody attempt" of his accusers ; who, having waited upon them for the result of their deliberations, were dismissed with "most evident signs of disliking their unnatural suit."*

No sooner was Knox gone, than Dr. Cox, who had privately concerted the plan with a civilian of Frankfort, procured an order from the magistrates for the unlimited use of the English

* Troubles of Frankfort, p. 22—38.

liturgy. The next step was the abrogation of the discipline, and the appointment of new ecclesiastical officers, without taking the least notice of those already chosen. Having accomplished these important improvements, they could boast that they had "the face of an English church!" But it may be asked, what was the price by which it was purchased? It was obtained at the expense of charity, justice, and unanimity, and by the exercise of malice and cruelty!

Let it not be forgotten, however, that the men of whom these things are related were at this time suffering as protestant exiles, and that they professedly detested the body of popery, though childishly and superstitiously fond of its attire and its intolerance! The original members of the congregation, to whom the place of worship had been granted, and who made all the desired arrangements of the society by mutual agreement, were dislodged from their happy station, and, in effect, driven from the place. When the Coxian plot was perfected and announced, Mr. Whittingham, one of the original congregation, said, "he would willingly obey, not doubting that it might be lawful for him and others, to join themselves to some other church." Upon the mention of this, Dr. Cox sought "that it might not be suffered;" to which Mr. Whittingham replied, "That it would be too great cruelty to force men, contrary to their consciences, to obey their disordered doings."

The conduct of the dominant party was considered as "cruel and more than tyrannical;" while the deportment of the others was throughout friendly, charitable, and affectionate; and the liberties which they claimed were natural, unassumed, and the birthright of man. Since both parties had fled from the tyrannizing oppressions and cruelties of their native country, what a shame and scandal it was to indulge such unhallowed tempers and unchristian practice one towards another, among strangers in a foreign land, instead of leaving all such intolerance as the birthright of papists. After the injurious treatment of Mr. Knox and his brethren, a considerable number of the members removed from Frankfort. Some of them, among whom was John Fox, the celebrated Martyrologist, repaired to Basil, and others went to other places. The greater part retired to Geneva, where they obtained a place of worship, and

lived in great harmony and affection, until the storm of persecution in England subsided, by the death of queen Mary.*

The disgraceful proceedings at Frankfort deeply involved the cause of Christian freedom, and formed a new epocha in the history of religious liberty. Here, on the one hand, we behold English protestants contending and quarrelling with their brethren, about the use of English forms and ceremonies in the worship of God in a foreign land ; and, on the other, we see the pious advocates of peace, and charity, and moderation, whose religious rights were torn from them by treachery and violence ; and who, having settled among the best reformed churches in Europe, derived invaluable instruction. Placed in these propitious circumstances, their friendly and familiar intercourse with the most learned Reformers abroad, assisted in no small degree to expand their views, and to liberalize their minds. They now began to study and to appreciate more fully the grand protestant doctrine—of every man embracing the religion of his own choice ; on which they conducted their affairs during their abode in a foreign land. In this school of Christian charity, they were placed for several years ; and, far from neglecting the advantages which they enjoyed, their minds became richly stored with the most salutary wisdom and knowledge ; which, on their return to their native land, they laid out to the greatest possible advantage, to promote the welfare of society, and the prosperity of the church of God, as we shall learn from the following reign.

* Troubles of Frankfort, p. 38—47.

CHAPTER V.

THE REIGN OF QUEEN ELIZABETH.



SECTION I.

*Legislative Attempts to Establish Uniformity in Religion
unfavourable to Religious Freedom.*

THE death of queen Mary, which was a great blow to the popish party, gave new life to the better part of the nation. Her sister ELIZABETH, who had complied outwardly with the changes in the late reign, yet with difficulty preserved her life, was known to favour the reformation. Never did princess ascend a throne under greater disadvantages; yet such was her wisdom and policy, that she eventually overcame every difficulty, and raised the nation to a pitch of glory that commanded the admiration and respect of all other countries.* All this is due to Elizabeth, whose praises have resounded by so many historians, and whose government was conducted by the most consummate policy. Her character, however, in relation to the important questions of civil and *religious* liberty, will admit of very considerable abatement.

The news of her majesty's accession had no sooner reached the continent, than most of the worthy exiles with joy returned home; and those who had concealed themselves, during the Marian persecution, came forth as men restored from the dead. Her majesty was received in the metropolis with all the joy that could be expressed by people delivered from the terrors of slavery and of fire; and she returned their acclamations with an affability which had never been witnessed from persons in her situation. As she passed through the city of London, upon her arrival at the upper end of Cheapside, she was presented with a Bible, having this inscription upon it: "The

* Welwood, p. 17.

Word of Truth." As soon as her majesty had received it, she kissed it, held it up with both her hands, then laid it upon her breast, thanking the city for the present; and added, "That she would often read over that Book."*

The queen immediately upon her accession, issued her royal proclamation commanding all her loving subjects, "That they should make no innovation in the state of religion, and that all persons should conform themselves for the present, to the practice of her majesty's chapel, till otherwise appointed."† Her highness also issued another proclamation, commanding all her subjects, "That they forbear to preach, or to give audience to any manner of doctrine or preaching, other than to the gospels and epistles of the day, and to the ten commandments in the vulgar tongue, without exposition or addition; or to use any other manner of public prayer, rite or ceremony in the church, than that which is already used and by law received, or the common litany, and the Lord's prayer and the creed in English: until consultation may be had by her majesty and her three estates of the realm, for the better conciliation in matters of religion: the true advancement of which; to the due honour of Almighty God, the increase of virtue and godliness, with universal charity and concord, her majesty most desireth and meaneth effectually to procure and restore to this her realm. As her majesty instantly requireth all her good, faithful, and loving subjects to render due obedience; so if any shall use themselves to the breach hereof, her majesty must and will see them duly punished according to the quality of their offence, and for an example to all others."‡ The queen, therefore, commenced the great work of the reformation by forbidding her subjects to be reformed *sooner*, and closed it, as we shall find in the sequel, by prohibiting them from reforming *farther*, than she thought proper.

The established religion continued for a time in the same condition in which the late queen had left it. Elizabeth had been trained from her infancy in the hatred of popery, and her title to the crown was founded on a marriage made in defiance of the pope; yet her first impressions in her father's

* Strype, vol. i. p. 30.

† Heylin's Pres. p. 245.

‡ Strype, vol. i. Appen. p. 3, 4.

reign were in favour of the old superstitious rites which she was pleased to retain; and she was naturally inclined to outward magnificence in the devotions of the church, as well as in the proceedings of the state. As she thought that, in her brother's reign, religion had been stripped *too much* of its former external ornaments; so it was her intention, that images should be still preserved in the churches, and that the sacrament should be explained in such general terms, that those who believed the corporeal presence of Christ, might not be driven from the church by too nice an interpretation. Her principal desire was to make the changes which she deemed necessary, in such a way as might, if possible, include all her subjects, or at least prevent all division and animosity. And, as in the alterations formerly made, particularly in renouncing the papacy, and rejecting the old ceremonies, the whole of the clergy had concurred, she apprehended it best to follow these alterations by slow and easy steps.*

Her majesty, accordingly, appointed a committee of divines to review king Edward's liturgy, when she commanded them carefully to strike out all passages that were at all offensive to the pope, and to make the people as easy as possible about the corporeal presence. In obedience to these authoratative instructions, the liturgy was exceedingly well fitted to the approbation of the papists.† The queen also commanded, that the Lord's table should be placed in the form of an altar; that reverence should be made at the name of Jesus; that instrumental music should be retained in the churches; that all the ridiculous festivals should be observed as in times of popery. She retained the old hierarchy, together with nearly all its useless and burdensome officers; only she abolished the monastic institutions; and transferred the lofty pretensions of the pope to her own person. It cannot, therefore, be too well understood, that the reformation of king Edward, instead of being carried forwards and perfected, was removed considerably backwards; partly, says a learned prelate, from the queen's love of outward magnificence in religion, and partly in compliance with the papists!‡

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 408. † Burnet, vol. ii. p. 392.—Heylin's Pres. p. 259.

‡ Heylin's Refor. p. 283.—Burnet, vol. iii. p. 305.

Upon the meeting of the two houses of parliament, their first object was to rescind all the laws relating to religion, that had been made in the late reign; and they were repealed by her majesty's two houses with as much facility as they had enacted them.* This pliability in two branches of the legislative body, chosen to be the guardians of the public welfare, is truly marvellous; but the charge of versatility falls most heavily on the peers, who held a permanent rank in the constitution. From the facility with which they complied with all the changes in the last three reigns, it may be strongly suspected, not only that they were most accomplished courtiers, but that they would not have deserted Elizabeth's religion had she declared herself high-priestess of the Sun.

With the foregoing alterations, the queen's ideas of a church were turned into an act of parliament, which passed both houses, June 24, 1559, entitled, "An Act for the Uniformity of Common-prayer, and service in the church, and administration of the Sacraments."† This act of queen Elizabeth, which was framed and carried in direct opposition to her bishops, decided that the people of England should be protestants, and that the laws of the land should make them protestants. By this law, all her majesty's subjects were required, under heavy penalties, to measure their religion by act of parliament; and, though it was intended to establish a perfect uniformity in public worship, that uniformity could never be accomplished. Many of the learned Reformers were dissatisfied with the popish impurities contained in the Book of Common-prayer, and with the rigorous imposition of them in the worship of God. When, therefore, it was disputed, "Whether it was most proper to retain the outward appearance of things, as nearly as possible to what had been practised in times of popery," they recommended, that every thing might be removed as far as possible from the corruptions of the church of Rome.‡ Those who claimed liberty of conscience from these ecclesiastical impositions, were stigmatized with the odious name of PURITANS. This was a term of reproach given them by the opposite party, because they wished to serve and worship God with greater *purity* than was allowed

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 385.

† Strype, vol. i. p. 71.

‡ Burnet, vol. iii. p. 302.

and established in the new legislative church. All persons were stigmatized by this reproachful name, who defended the rights of conscience, who distinguished themselves in the cause of religious freedom, or who could not in all points conform to the religion provided by the queen and parliament.

The act of uniformity under Elizabeth has always been considered as a principal bulwark of the English reformation, and as the grand basis on which the English legislative church was founded ; on these accounts it demands our most attentive and impartial examination. That the reader may have a correct and luminous view of this important subject, it will be necessary to recite several of the principal clauses contained in this memorable statute, and make certain remarks upon this extraordinary enactment. After the usual preamble, this act commands as follows :

“ That all and singular ministers within her majesty’s dominions, shall from and after the feast of the nativity of John the Baptist next coming, be bound to say and use the matins, even-song, celebration of the Lord’s supper, and administration of each of the sacraments, and all the common and open prayer, in such order and form as is mentioned in the said Book, so authorized by parliament.

“ And that if any parson, vicar, or other minister, that ought to sing or say Common-prayer mentioned in the said Book, or minister the sacraments, shall refuse to use the said Common-prayer, or to minister the sacraments, in such order or form as they are mentioned and set forth in the said Book, or shall wilfully and obstinately use any other rite, ceremony, order, form, or manner of celebrating the Lord’s supper, openly or privily, or matins, even-song, administration of the sacraments, or other open prayers than is mentioned in the said Book ; or shall preach, declare, or speak any thing in the derogation of the said Book, or any thing therein contained or any part thereof, and shall be thereof lawfully convicted, he shall lose and forfeit to the queen’s majesty, for his *first* offence the profit of all his spiritual benefices or promotions arising in one whole year next after his conviction : also the person so convicted shall for the same offence suffer imprisonment for the space of *six months* without bail or mainprise.

“ And if any such person once convicted of any offence

concerning the premises, shall after his first conviction again offend, and be thereof lawfully convicted, that then the said person shall for his *second* offence suffer imprisonment by the space of *one whole year*, and be deprived, *ipso facto*, of *all his spiritual promotions*; and it shall be lawful for the patrons of all such promotions to dispose of them as though the person so offending were dead.

“ And that if any such person, after he shall be twice convicted as aforesaid, shall offend against any of the premises the *third* time, and shall be thereof lawfully convicted; that then the person so offending, and convicted the third time, shall be deprived, *ipso facto*, of all his spiritual promotions, and also shall suffer imprisonment *during his life*.”

These clauses had a special relation to the clergy; but, to stop the mouths of all the people in the land, it was further enacted—“ That if any person or persons whatsoever, after the said feast of John the Baptist next coming, shall in any interludes, plays, songs, rhymes, or any other words, declare or speak any thing in the derogation, depraving, or despising of the said Book, or any thing therein contained; or shall by open fact, deed, or threatening, compel or cause, procure or maintain any parson, vicar, or other minister, to sing or say any common or other prayer, or to minister any sacrament, in any manner and form than is mentioned in the said Book; that then every such person being thereof lawfully convicted shall forfeit to the queen our sovereign lady for the *first* offence *one hundred marks*.—For the *second* offence, he shall forfeit *four hundred marks*.—And for the *third* offence, he shall forfeit *all his goods and chattels*, and shall suffer imprisonment *during his life* !”*

In our comments on this memorable statute, it is perfectly unnecessary to inquire whether the great Author of Christianity, the Head and Lawgiver of the church, ever issued so extraordinary an enactment; neither is it necessary to detain the reader by proving, that the statute book of God stood in no need of such political appendages: these are points upon which there will at the present day be only one opinion, excepting from persons strongly addicted to the ignorance and intole-

* Sparrow, p. 111—113.

rance of the dark ages. Nor is it requisite to inquire how far queen Elizabeth's church was composed of precisely similar materials as the Christian churches in apostolic times; since the reader will clearly perceive that she compelled, by heavy temporal penalties, all the people in the land to become members, and that the primitive churches were perfectly voluntary societies, whose members were "beloved of God"—"sanctified in Christ Jesus"—"called to be saints." It is equally unnecessary to examine the numerous popish superstitions and corruptions retained in the Book of Common-prayer, and in the forms and ceremonies here imposed upon the nation; though these were burdens too grievous to be borne at any period, unless it were in the early days of queen Elizabeth, and till they could have been removed out of the church. We shall not particularly advert to the dreadful penalties contained in this extraordinary statute; nor enlarge upon the trivial circumstances which by this act are transformed into crimes of enormous magnitude. All these particulars, with many others, will obviously appear from the recital now laid before the reader.

But on supposition that every word and syllable in the Prayer-book, with every appended rite and ceremony, had in all respects been equally infallible as the lofty pretensions of the mother church whence they were derived, the flagrant injustice of this act, and its tyrannical encroachment on the indubitable right of every man to choose his own religion, would nevertheless have been glaringly manifest to all the world. Could the legislative body persuade themselves, that, upon Elizabeth's emerging from the tower, and receiving the crown at Westminster, all British subjects had emerged from the corruptions and abominations of popery, which during the late reign had deluged the kingdom, and, in conformity to their new princess, embraced the protestant doctrines and worship? If they were sure this was not the case, and they had the strongest evidence of it before their eyes, then they must have clearly seen, that the measure which they adopted when they formed this act, would compel all scrupulous dissenters from the legislative church to become hypocrites, by forcing them to act in direct opposition to the light and convictions of their own minds, or would inflict upon them most

disgraceful and barbarous punishment, for not believing that which they could not believe, and not practising in religion that which appeared to them odious in the sight of God. Thus, we see, that the power of imposing and punishing in matters of religion, which was certainly the worst part of popery, was retained in the protestant church as modelled by queen Elizabeth.

One great design of this statute was to make persons conformable churchmen. It will, however, be found a poor excuse for cruelty, that it helped to fill the church with nominal professors, and to promote the unity of forms of worship in the bond of ignorance, fear, and hypocrisy. Men may compel others, though not to think with them, for that is impossible, but to say they do; upon which they obtain full leave, not to think or reason at all, and this is called *unity* or uniformity; which is somewhat like the behaviour of the Romans, as it is described by our brave countryman;—"Where they impose silence, they secure peace." Conviction and persuasion can never be effected by the imperious menaces of princes, or of legislative bodies. You can no more subdue the understanding with blows, than you can beat down a castle with syllogisms. When a man suffers, and sees his friends suffer, for conscience' sake, he perceives the beauty of that sacred rule, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them:" but when they or their own party use the coarse weapons of temporal penalties, to compel the belief and practice of Christianity, they forsooth can see no great harm in it!*

Elizabeth's famous act of uniformity was a direct subversion of this grand protestant principle—that religion is matter of individual choice. It flagrantly encroached upon man's dearest rights; imperiously demanded obedience where no obedience was due; denounced tremendous penalties where there was no crime. Indeed, as religion is wholly a concern of the heart, as its principles are all divine, and all contained in one volume, and that volume, as well as the interpretation of it, is common property, and the common claim of all true protestants, it will inevitably follow, that all acts and edicts, re-

* Jortin's Remarks, Pref. p. 12—14.

quiring obedience in matters of religion, are nullified ; and, as in the case before us, nothing short of a new revelation from heaven, sanctioning these new claims, could render them binding on the churches of Jesus Christ. This principle must be fully and inflexibly maintained in all its bearings : otherwise we again plunge ourselves into the darkness and slavery of the middle ages, and place our consciences in the most cruel and degrading bondage.

It is very commonly, but very jesuitically, insinuated and affirmed, that Christ and his apostles taught the duty of submitting *universally* to civil governors, and that since the civil governors in the time of queen Elizabeth legalized and established a definite form of Christianity, the people were bound by divine authority, as well as by apostolic example, to obey. —So far were the apostles from owing any thing to established forms of worship, or paying any deference to the will of man in such matters, though in all *civil* concerns they were punctiliously obedient, we find them everywhere teaching the contrary ;—setting up a new religion without even consulting princes ;—enforcing the commands of God in violation of the commands of civil rulers, in all cases when they stepped out of their province to establish religion ;—and preparing the minds of their converts to expect and endure the most painful sufferings, rather than admit the interference of civil governors in any such matters.

If, indeed, such authority exist in civil governors, it must be derived from divine revelation, granting the holy charter, or from the very nature of the social compact. The evidence that it is derived from revelation has never yet been adduced, and very rarely pretended. And the slightest reference to the origin and nature of society, will demonstrate that such authority never could be delegated to civil rulers without a violation of the claims of God, and the rights of conscience—without an entire sacrifice of our judgments and feelings at the shrine of civil power—without the complete prostration of every thing that ennobles and characterizes rational man. All human authority is necessarily supported by corporal punishments, and without coercion such authority cannot exist : but the Gospel of Christ most peremptorily prohibits all coercion in religion, and consequently excludes all human autho-

riety to the efficiency of which such coercion is indispensably necessary.

If all the foregoing proceedings of queen Elizabeth and her parliament had been just and good, how and by whom was the British legislature invested with power and authority to make so extraordinary a law, or even any other law, for the religious government of the church of God? Sufficient evidence has never been produced, that any man or body of men on earth, actually possesses power and authority to make new laws for the government of Christianity, and for imposing religion, by temporal penalties, upon the community. Unless the lofty claim be accompanied by omniscience and infallibility, it is the grossest arrogance and presumption; since these qualifications are indispensably necessary to making and enforcing laws for that kingdom which is not of this world. The government of the Redeemer's kingdom is spiritual and religious, not civil or political; and has a special relation to men's intellectual powers, which are manifestly incapable of government by statute laws, or by any human devices whatsoever. As all the ruling powers on earth, unless possessed of omniscience and infallibility, are absolutely unable to inspect and rule the human heart; so are they equally unable to enforce and establish the great doctrines and duties of Christianity, which immediately and principally concern the heart. This is the sovereign and righteous prerogative of God alone. By what means, or on what grounds, then, will the highest ruling powers on earth attempt to enforce and establish in the church of Christ, the laws and devices of men? "Howbeit," saith the Son of God, "in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Human authority and temporal penalties may, indeed, constrain men to profess and practise almost any thing, whether they believe it or disbelieve it; but its strongest arguments are manifestly too weak to convince the understanding and the conscience, and to influence man's affections and propensities towards his Maker. These intellectual powers, which are particularly concerned in all matters of religious faith and practice, are wholly subject to the authority and government of God. No human power or authority, and consequently no human laws, can possibly be employed or be of any use in this

intellectual government. The laws of religion have always the noblest objects in view—objects which are invariably far beyond the power and cognizance of man; so that all human attempts to control, impose, or establish religion, except by affectionate entreaty and sound persuasion, are always feeble, ineffectual, and antichristian. No church on earth can, with justice, claim the character of being a pure, apostolic church, that makes new laws, enacts new penalties, and inflicts temporal punishments for supposed spiritual delinquency: no church has any right to this high claim whose constitution, government, and formularies are unauthorized by the canon of the New Testament.

By the foregoing parliamentary enactment, all scrupulous persons, catholics or protestants, were placed in very peculiar circumstances. How could they act, so as not to offend the state, or their own consciences? how could they preserve both the reverence due to legislative authority, and that which they indispensably owed to the King of heaven? To have testified their obedience to this law, they must have renounced their fidelity to God and to conscience: but to have avowed their unalterable allegiance to the latter, they must have been considered and punished as felons by the former! This statute, therefore, placed all such persons in a singular dilemma! The records of antiquity, and the authority of the legislature, assuredly enforced religious obedience in the reign of queen Elizabeth: but the records of much greater antiquity, and an authority far superior to that of any legislature, demanded the exercise of Christian liberality, and enforced obedience to the Christian code. This remarkable enactment could boast of considerable alterations and additions to the religion contained in the New Testament; but the good people of those times were satisfied with the unadorned and unimproved original, in hope of its eternal rewards.

It may however be asked, what would have been the advantage of granting the assumption of human power to govern or establish religion? Would it have been of any real advantage to the legislative body, or even to those whom they governed? Legislative authorities would certainly in this case *appear* more lofty and magnificent, because extending to things religious, as well as civil—to the kingdoms of this world, and to

that "kingdom which is not of this world;" but it would be so *only* in appearance, and not in reality. The allowance of legislative authority in matters of religion, even to the largest possible extent, could be of no real benefit to any civil government, since it is absolutely impossible for them to possess it: civil governors can only possess the *name*, or the *appearance* of such authority; the authority itself cannot possibly be enjoyed by mortals. God, the only infallible judge between religious truth and error, and to whom all religious obedience belongs, has the *sovereign* and *exclusive* authority to command in matters of faith and worship, and he will never delegate this authority to any other. So that when we deny religious authority to be any part of the prerogative of princes and legislative bodies, we do not attempt to deprive them of any part of their prerogatives, or of any qualification with which it is possible for men to be endowed. We wish to see princes firmly and happily fixed on their thrones, distributing justice to the utmost possible extent among all their subjects; but we dare not—we cannot deny, that all power, and authority, and judgment, in things pertaining to religion and the salvation of our souls, belongs to the great Governor of the universe—to his tribunal *alone* are we accountable in all such matters. We feel therefore bound, on the strongest grounds that can possibly exist, and to the greatest possible extent, "To render unto God the things that are God's."

As the allowance of the assumption would be of no advantage to any legislative body; so it would be of no real benefit whatever to those who are governed. With the Bible in their hands, they could not propose any advantage to themselves by allowing the ruling powers to prescribe to their consciences, what articles of faith they should believe, what forms of worship they should observe, what rites and ceremonies they should use, and what prayers they should offer to Almighty God. But to allow all this under the heaviest penalties, as in queen Elizabeth's act of uniformity, a man must surrender the rights of conscience, and yield his soul a slave to the policy of the state; and, after all his pretended devotion, his obedience will be only civil or political. Obedience to the decrees and laws of men, however high their authority, cannot be called *religious* obedience, nor the services thus performed be called

religious services ; for, as all the laws and appointments of religion must necessarily come from God ; so all religious obedience must be presented to him, and no part of it can be presented to a creature. We rejoice that we are bound to observe all the duties of *civil* obedience, and to render in all things that which is due to the ruling powers of this world, which we do from principle, from conscience, and from choice ; but we cannot favour them with the service of our souls, by offering them obedience in matters of faith and worship. Our souls and the duties of religious faith and Christian worship, we must present to a higher court, before they can be “ holy, acceptable, and well-pleasing to God.”

Would there be any degree of equity in a law which attached pravity or degradation to every person living in any particular district of the country ? Such a law would be deemed by all as monstrous and absurd : it would punish where no offence existed. Queen Elizabeth’s act of uniformity, not only infringed on the indubitable rights and sacred obligations of her subjects, but inflicted tremendous temporal punishments upon them, when their *religion* was their only crime. Was this act then according to the New Testament of Jesus Christ, which teaches men to “ serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear ?”

The act of uniformity prescribed, under the heaviest temporal penalties, what particular forms of worship the people should observe, what rites and ceremonies they should use, and what public prayers they should offer to the Almighty ; no appeal, complaint, or scruple of conscience to the contrary, being admitted. For if any person should at any time “ declare or speak any thing in the derogation of the Book of Common-prayer or any thing therein contained,” the thundering judgments of this act were to be inflicted upon him. All denominations of protestants have been moved, and their holy indignation roused, at the cruel barbarities of Henry VIII., in burning men who could not conform in all points to the standard of religion which he was pleased to set up for all his subjects ; and why should they admire and applaud the conduct of Elizabeth, in robbing her subjects of “ all their goods and chattels,” and causing them to pine to death in prison, for precisely the same offence ? Had all Elizabeth’s subjects, like

those of Henry, been considered as unconscious beings, destitute of all obligation to God, and mere machines, the terrors of this memorable statute would not have been quite so apparent : but, since they were rational and accountable creatures ; since they were capable of thinking and deciding for themselves ; and since they were under the most awful responsibility to God for the exercise of their faith and piety, its despotism, its cruelty, its outrage, are flagrantly manifest to all.

This statute, rigidly enforced, kept the church of England in a state of convulsion for nearly a century, and defiled her with some of the foulest stains which can disgrace a religious body. On this famous act, with several others of less note, were the English reformation and the established church originally founded. This legislative enactment was the grand pillar which supported the superb fabric, or the foundation on which the magnificent superstructure was erected. In the adoption of this celebrated statute, with one or two more, queen Elizabeth and her two houses of parliament refused obedience to the papal power, and absolutely rejected the highest ecclesiastical authority ever claimed by man ; yea, by the tremendous pains and penalties of this act, they compelled all her majesty's subjects, clergy and laity, to imitate their example. We often find that men, in passing from one extreme, are in danger of sliding into another. Thus it was in the case before us. While the legislative Reformers rejected the spiritual authority of Rome, they set up their own spiritual authority as the basis of the reformation, and their own proceedings as the only standard of true religion : in other words, they cast off the *popish* antichrist of Rome, and set up the *protestant* antichrist of England.

It will be necessary to inquire, how far this statute affected the rights of conscience, and the undeniable liberties of mankind ? All these were swept away in one common wreck. According to this act, conscience had no rights to claim, and human nature had no liberties to enjoy ; therefore none were appreciated, none allowed : all such rights and liberties were overthrown and destroyed. The only rights and liberties supposed by this act to exist, were direction and compulsion on the part of the legislature, and devout subjection, without thinking and judging for themselves, on the part of all the

people. The ruling powers having assumed this high authority, allowed all the people in the land the right and liberty to observe those forms of worship which they had prescribed, to use those rites and ceremonies which they had enjoined, and to offer those prayers to Almighty God which they had commanded ; but in every failure to observe these things, or “ to speak any thing ” against them, they incurred the terrific judgments contained in the act. Thus the rights of conscience and the unalienable liberties of man’s rational nature, so far as related to religion, were overwhelmed and lost.

One important point in the act of uniformity has not been noticed, but which is worthy of some consideration. The clause enacts—“ That *every person inhabiting within her majesty’s dominions*, shall diligently and faithfully, having no lawful or reasonable excuse to be absent, endeavour themselves to resort to their parish church or chapel, or to some usual place where Common-prayer and such service of God shall be used, upon every Sunday and other days ordained and used as holy-days ; and then and there to abide orderly and soberly, during the time of the Common-prayer, preaching or other service of God, there to be used and ministered, upon pain of punishment by the *censures of the church* : also upon pain that every person offending, shall forfeit for such offence *twelve pence*, to be levied by the church-wardens of the parish where such offence shall be done, by way of *distress*. And for due execution hereof, the queen’s most excellent majesty, the lords spiritual, and all the commons in this present parliament, do in God’s name earnestly require and charge all the archbishops, bishops, and other ordinaries, that they shall endeavour to the uttermost of their knowledges that the due and true execution hereof may be had throughout their dioceses and charges, as they will answer before God, for such evils and plagues wherewith Almighty God may justly punish his people, for neglecting this *good and wholesome law*.”*

This clause requires very little comment. It discovers precisely the same intolerant principles, and breathes precisely the same persecuting spirit, as the clauses already recited—with this additional circumstance, that in the former peculi-

* Sparrow, p. 114, 115.

arities of the statute, the mouths of all the people in the land were effectually stopped from objecting against any thing contained in the forms, ceremonies and prayers of the church ; but in this, all the people in England, unless some lawful excuse prevented, were bound to a *constant attendance* on the established worship, upon the scandalous forfeiture of *twelve pence*, and the *unlimited censures of the church*, for every omission : and remarkable as it will appear to all professed protestants, this law received the high appellation of a *good and wholesome law* !! Upon the passing, therefore, of this act, all who conscientiously scrupled the political religion now set up, or who disapproved of the legislative prayers, ceremonies, or forms of worship, had the most melancholy prospects, daily expecting to be impoverished and ruined, for the sake of a good conscience and their firm allegiance to Jesus Christ.

The effects of this statute did not remain long concealed, to the lasting disgrace of the reformation. Many of the learned exiles in the late reign, who had settled for several years among the best reformed churches in Europe, examined with becoming zeal and attention the grand principles of the reformation, and returned home richly fraught with wisdom, knowledge, and experience. They wished to have the church purged of all its antichristian impurities, and to have its discipline, its government, and its worship, as well as its doctrine, regulated by the standard of holy Scripture. Most of the dignified clergy were exceedingly hostile to their views, though certainly not much to the reputation of their character. For, notwithstanding their conformity to the present ecclesiastical establishment, they wished to keep as near as possible to the church of Rome, in hopes of a counter-revolution in favour of popery.

The pious exiles in general imbibed more correct views of a Christian church and the worship of God, than those which were adopted ; yet, because they did not comport with the views of the state, they were totally rejected, and those who had imbibed them were refused even a toleration. Under these painful circumstances, the foreign Reformers, from the tenderest sympathy and compassion, made intercession to the queen for indulgence to these her good and faithful subjects ; but Elizabeth, unwilling to allow the least variety in the public worship of God, resolutely answered, "That it was not

consistent with her *safety, honour, and credit*, to *permit* diversity of opinions in a kingdom where none but she and her council governed !”*

During this long reign, several other laws were passed, though of minor importance, yet equally hostile to Christianity and the natural rights of her majesty’s subjects ; to which it will be necessary to direct the reader’s unbiassed attention. We wish to present a correct view of the principal legislative attempts to impose uniformity in religion ; that it may appear from the most convincing evidence, how far the undeniable rights of Christians were invaded and destroyed.

Early in this reign, the lord-keeper, addressing the two houses of parliament, signified, that the ecclesiastical discipline had not been good, and that the clergy had been slothful, which had occasioned two enormities : One was, that every man lived as he pleased, and without fear : the other, that many ceremonies had been agreed upon, but the right ornaments had been neglected or forgotten. He then added, that it was for want of discipline that so few attended the public service of the church, notwithstanding the parliament had already made a law to promote the *good order* to be observed in it : but if this be *too easy*, let it be made *sharper*. The want of discipline causeth obstinacy, contempt, and heresy.†

Every consistent protestant will no doubt conclude, that the edge of the foregoing act was keen enough already, without being made *sharper*. It was found, however, *too easy* ; upon which the legislative body made several additions and amendments. The puritans having endured great sufferings for about twenty years, several satirical pamphlets were published exposing the severe proceedings of the bishops, and the barbarity of the penal laws in religion. These publications not only awakened an equal degree of satire in the opposite party, but also roused the zeal and attention of the legislative body. The government, by the exercise of its wisdom and policy, interpreted writing against the ecclesiastical corruptions, the penal laws, the episcopal oppressions, and the Book of Common-prayer, as actual conspiracy, against her majesty’s person and government !! On this fatal rock her government split,

* Strype, vol. i. p. 87.

† D’Ewes, p. 6.

doing inconceivable mischief to multitudes of her majesty's loyal subjects; and on this destructive principle were several public statutes founded. This egregious and baneful error was, not only incorporated with the laws of the realm, but also constituted a fundamental point in the queen's government of her people. On this barbarous principle great numbers of her majesty's subjects were harassed and persecuted, in a manner too shocking to be here particularly related. Among the sufferers under these oppressive statutes were Messrs. John Udal, Henry Barrow, John Greenwood, and John Penry. They all received the sentence of death for books which they were *supposed*, but not *proved*, to have published *only* against the existing corruptions of the church, and the flagrant intolerance of the bishops. Udal, after long and miserable confinement, languished and died in prison; Barrow and Greenwood were hanged at Tyburn, and Penry at St. Thomas Waterings.

To uphold and secure the prosperity of the ecclesiastical establishment, it was deemed necessary, not only to cut off supposed excrescences, but also to force persons of all descriptions within the walls of the church, and compel them to attend upon its public service; for which purpose an act was passed, entitled, "An act to retain the Queen's Subjects in their due Obedience." This extraordinary statute proclaiming destruction to all who scrupled obedience, enacted—"That every person above the age of sixteen, who does not repair to some church, chapel, or usual place of Common-prayer, according to the act of uniformity, shall forfeit *twenty pounds per month* to the queen, and suffer imprisonment till paid! Those who are absent for *twelve* months, shall, besides their former fine, be bound with two sufficient sureties in a bond of *two hundred pounds*, until they conform! And every *school-master* who does not come to Common-prayer, shall forfeit *ten pounds* a month, be disabled from teaching school, and suffer one year's imprisonment!"* It is the character of the Whore of Babylon, says a learned churchman, that she made merchandise of souls; and he adds: "This was little better."†

Upon the publication of this act, the common people, who

* Burn's Eccl. Law, vol. ii. p. 146.—Strype's Whitgift, p. 95.

† Fuller, b. ix. p. 131.

could not conscientiously attend stately on the national worship, and were unable to pay the enormous fines, had nothing to expect but to rot in jails, where, indeed, multitudes languished and died. But the legislature, by these violent measures, overshot the mark; and instead of crushing those whose consciences scrupled these oppressions, or reconciling them to the church, they drove them farther from it. Men of integrity and conscience, will not be beaten from their principles by fines, imprisonment, or death; much less will they esteem the church that fights them with such weapons, or is upheld by such policy. Multitudes were by these methods driven to a total separation; many of whom became so far dissatisfied with the persecuting church of England, that they did not allow it to be a true church, or its ministers to be true ministers. They renounced all communion with it, not only in the prayers and ceremonies, but in hearing the word and the sacraments; concluding that it was altogether an antichristian communion. These were called **BROWNISTS**, from Robert Brown, the first open advocate of their principles. They endured almost innumerable sufferings from the foregoing barbarous statute, and from that which is next to be enumerated.

In the year 1592, one of the most unjust and inhuman acts for oppression and cruelty was passed, that was ever known in a protestant country. It is entitled, “An Act for the Punishment of Persons obstinately refusing to come to church;” and enacts, “that all persons above the age of sixteen years, refusing to come to church; or persuading others to deny her majesty’s authority in causes *ecclesiastical*; or dissuading them from coming to church; or being found present at any conventicle or meeting under pretence of religion; shall upon conviction be committed to prison, without bail, till they shall conform and come to church,” making the following recantation: “I do humbly confess and acknowledge, that I have grievously offended God, in contemning her majesty’s godly and lawful government and authority, by absenting myself from church, and from hearing divine service, contrary to the godly laws and statutes of this realm, and in frequenting unlawful assemblies, under pretence of religion:—And I do promise and protest, without any dissimulation, or any colour of dispensation, that from henceforth I will from time to time

obey and perform her majesty's laws in repairing to the church, and hearing divine service, and do my uttermost to maintain and defend the same.'” But in case such offenders refused to subscribe this degrading recantation, it was further enacted, “that within three months, they shall *abjure the realm*, and go into *perpetual banishment*: and if they do not depart within the time appointed; or if they ever return without the queen's license, they shall *suffer death without benefit of clergy* !!”*

This is one of the severest acts of oppression and cruelty, that was ever made by the representatives of a protestant country.† The case of the suffering puritans was by this act worse than that of felons; and herein Elizabeth far exceeded the tyranny of her father Henry. For, absolute and despotic as that monarch was, he contented himself with punishing those who *opposed* the established religion by some overt act; but by this extraordinary law, the subjects were compelled, under the heaviest penalties, to make an *open profession* of the religion of the state, by a constant attendance on its public service.

These terrible proceedings fell principally upon the Brownists, who were now become very numerous. In the passage of this law through the house of commons, Sir Walter Raleigh said, “It is to be feared that men *not guilty* will be included in it; and that law is hard which taketh life and sendeth into banishment, where men's *intentions* are to be judged by a jury, and they are to be judges what another *means*. I am afraid there are nearly twenty thousand Brownists in England; and when they are gone, who shall maintain their wives and children?” Another member said, “The clause of speaking against the law is very dangerous; and who can be safe from it? For if a man speak against nonresidents, excommunication, or any other abuse in the church, he will incur the danger of the law.”‡

The Brownists felt the terror and the vengeance of these legislative enactments. Their London congregation being obliged to assemble secretly in different places, to escape the notice of the watchful prelates, was at length discovered on a

* Burn's Eccl. Law, vol. ii. p. 247, 248.—Collier, vol. ii. p. 637.

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 465.

‡ D'Ewes, p. 517.

Lord's day at Islington, in the very place in which the protestant congregation had assembled in the reign of queen Mary; when about *fifty-six* were apprehended, and sent to the different prisons in and about London, where many others had been long confined. There they were crammed into close and filthy dungeons, under which barbarous usage many of them died in prison. Newgate, Bridewell, the Fleet, the Gatehouse, and other dreary regions, bore witness to their doleful cries and groans. Mr. Roger Rippon is said to have been the last of *sixteen* or *seventeen* who were murdered in Newgate!!*

These tragic measures differed very far from those which were used in the apostolic churches; they had not the remotest tendency to promote undefiled Christianity; neither were they likely to make many converts to the church of England. Who then violated "the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace?" If we take our estimate of the policy of queen Elizabeth, says a zealous churchman, by comparing it with that of modern times, and especially with the public measures since the revolution, she must certainly be condemned as a very arbitrary, if not a persecuting sovereign. In this age, however, when a religious toleration is enjoyed, and its reasonableness and policy are admitted by all wise and good men, the *sufferings* of so many truly pious persons on account of religion, during this period, will not be defended or palliated by any, but acknowledged and lamented by all. The great mistake, he adds, which was acted upon up to the period of the Revolution, was that of endeavouring to reduce all men to a *uniformity* of religious worship, by acts of parliament; a thing just as reasonable and practicable, as trying by the same means to force all men to be of the same complexion or stature. And to punish men for their religious opinions and practices, as such, is as unjust as it would be to inflict penalties on all persons speaking the same common language, who could not pronounce with a certain accent, or should use any provincial dialect.†

It was impossible for men of liberal and Christian principles, who exercised their intellectual powers, to receive favourable impressions from the proceedings of queen Elizabeth, or to

* Strype, vol. iv. p. 93, 133.

† Custance, p. 263, 266.

think highly of the church whose interests were promoted by such intolerant measures. Persons claiming the right of private judgment could not become proselytes to a communion upheld by such means. On the contrary, while these violent proceedings destroyed some by close and miserable imprisonment, and others were put to death on the gallows, great numbers were banished from their country, and forced to spend the rest of their days in a state of exile. Rejected by the church of England, they were received and allowed a toleration in Holland; where, with the leave of the states, they enjoyed liberty of conscience, and formed Christian churches according to their own views of the Gospel, at Amsterdam, Arnheim, Middleburgh, and Leyden. It is, therefore, a very pitiful triumph of a reverend author, who says, that the above "round dealings a little terrified the rest, and gave a check to the wiser sort."*

The Brownists, upon their settlement in Holland, published their confession of faith in 1596; and, in the preface, stated the grounds of their separation from the church of England, accompanied with some account of the unchristian and inhuman treatment which they and their brethren endured.

"To these churches, ministers, and service," say they, "must all the people come every Lord's day, though they have a preacher in the next parish, and in their own a dumb unlearned priest; yet are they all tied to their own church, and minister, and must receive the sacrament at least twice a year at his hands. If they refuse this, or do not ordinarily come to their parish church, then they are summoned, excommunicated, and imprisoned, till they become obedient. In this bondage are our countrymen held, under their priests and prelates; and such as by the word of God bear witness against and condemn these abominations, they hate, put to death, or persecute out of the land.

"Thou seest, good Christian reader, to all these things, if we were among them, should we have to submit our bodies and souls, or else suffer violence at the hands of the prelates, and end our days by violent death, or most miserable imprisonment, as many of our brethren already have done. For so

† Foulis' Plots, p. 61.

great is the power and malice of those Romish priests, that they persecute unto death such as speak against them ; and such poor Christians as they cast into their noisome prisons, can seldom or never get out, except with shipwreck of conscience, until they are carried to their graves. Nor is there any care taken for their relief ; but being confined in prison, they are detained without any allowance of meat or money, be their wants and poverty ever so great. If they have any thing of their own, they are forced to spend it : if they have nothing, they are left by the prelates to feed on the air.

“ That they may be the more readily starved, or weakened in the truth, they are commonly shut up in close prison, their friends and acquaintance not being suffered to come near them : nay, even their wives and children are debarred from them, by the tyranny of these bloody prelates and their instruments ; whose hard hearts and unnatural cruelty, if thou didst understand, gentle reader, as many of us have felt, and to this day still feel, it would make thy heart bleed, on account of their unmerciful and barbarous cruelty. How many souls have perished through miserable usage in their prisons, how many have been put to death, and how many banished, though we could relate to their eternal infamy, yet will we not blaze abroad their acts ; for we take no delight in exposing their shame, but mourn for them in secret, committing our cause to God who judgeth righteously : knowing that ‘ When he maketh inquisition for blood, he will remember them, and will not forget the cry of the poor.’ There are others, for whom we pray, who are still in bonds and prison for the testimony of Jesus, enduring a great fight of afflictions ; and having the sentence of death in themselves, are likely there to end their days, if the Lord send not unexpected deliverance.”*—Some further account of the persecuted Brownists will be found in the subsequent pages of this history.

The foregoing inhumanities were inflicted upon the queen’s best protestant subjects : other rigours and severities were directed against Roman catholics. By one public statute, all Jesuits and priests, ordained by the authority of holy see, were commanded to depart the realm within forty days ; and

* Confession, Pref.

that no such person should hereafter be suffered to come into, or remain within, any of her majesty's dominions, under the penalties of *high treason* ! Those who received, relieved, comforted, or aided any such ecclesiastical persons were adjudged *felons*, and appointed to *suffer death*, without benefit of clergy ! And those who knew of any such priests being in the realm, and who did not make the discovery to some justice of the peace within twelve days, should be fined and imprisoned according to the queen's pleasure ; and the justice not certifying the discovery to the privy-council within twenty-eight days, should forfeit two hundred marks. Also any other of her majesty's subjects, who shall be brought up in any foreign popish seminary, and who, within six months after proclamation, does not return into the realm, and within two days submit himself to the laws and take the oath of the first of the queen, shall be adjudged a *traitor* ! Any persons, directly or indirectly, contributing to the maintenance of Romish ecclesiastics, or popish seminaries beyond sea, or of any individual therein, incurred the penalties of the statute of premunire. And further to guard against the evils apprehended from a popish education, this statute enacted, that no one during her majesty's life, should send his child or other person under his obedience, beyond sea, without special license under the hand and seal of her majesty, or the lords of the privy-council, under forfeiture of one hundred pounds for every offence.*

One statute enacted, " that if any priest or Jesuit should seduce any of her majesty's subjects from the church of England, to that of Rome ; or if any should reconcile themselves to the Romish communion, they should suffer *death*, as in the case of *high treason* ! And that whosoever should say or sing mass, should forfeit *two hundred marks*, and be committed to prison one whole year ; and that every person who should willingly *hear* mass, should forfeit *one hundred marks* ! "† Another statute denounced against those who professed the popish religion, that all lands, tenements, and hereditaments granted since the beginning of the queen's reign, or hereafter to be granted by a popish recusant, whereby he and his family were maintained, should be utterly void as against the queen's

* Brown's Laws, p. 42.

† Strype's Whitgift, p. 95.

majesty ! And every such offender, without further indictment or conviction, should pay into the exchequer *twenty pounds* for every month since his conviction, or in default thereof the queen may take all his goods, and two-thirds of his lands, “ leaving the third part only of the same lands, tenements, hereditaments, and farms for the maintenance and relief of the offender, his wife, children, and family ! ! ” *

The queen also issued a proclamation, in which she expressed her determination to *root out* the catholic religion by any means, however violent ; and her infatuation carried her so far beyond all rational bounds, that she ordered the execution of martial law on all who imported any prohibited popish books from abroad ! † Not less than seventy priests were banished at one time ; and Camden, though a warm apologist of the errors of Elizabeth, admits that within ten years *fifty* priests were executed and *fifty-five* banished ! These executions, under the sanction of legal process, were attended with circumstances of barbarity disgraceful to human nature. ‡ It has been affirmed by the party, that *two hundred* catholics were hanged, drawn, and quartered, during this reign, for the mere profession or exercise of their religion ! The catholics therefore complained, as in justice they might complain, that the reformation “ by violence, by slaughter, by conquest, and by blood, agreed not with the doctrine of Christ and his apostles.”

After the detail of all these facts, it ought to be distinctly understood, that the church of England, with the whole of its reformation, was founded on the foregoing acts of parliament. From this political source the church derived her existence, and from the same origin her existence was made permanent. By all these enactments, a perfect uniformity in religion was attempted, but could never be effected, and is, indeed, absolutely impracticable : at least, until the rulers and governors of Christianity can force all the bishops, clergy and common people, to believe on all points what they prescribe, and to approve of all things that they enjoin. The foregoing legislative enactments attempted to accomplish that which was absolutely beyond the power of man ; and, so far as they were

* Brown, p. 43.

† Strype's Eccl. Mem. vol. iii. p. 570.

‡ Kennet, vol. ii. p. 497, 549.

brought into active operation upon the religion of the people, the queen's subjects were treated as slaves, or as mere machines under the control of the political power; and thus the pretended establishment of religion by these oppressive measures, not only utterly failed to accomplish what was proposed, but absolutely subverted and destroyed the people's dearest rights to a religion of their own choice.

SECTION II.

Ecclesiastical Supremacy founded on Antichristian Usurpation.

THE ecclesiastical supremacy formed a leading character in the reign of queen Elizabeth. Upon the rejection of the papal domination, and the final settlement of the legislative reformation, her majesty's supremacy was permanently established; and no historical fact can be more obvious, than that this supremacy had a considerable share of influence on the great national transactions of this long reign, especially on those relating to religion. The act of uniformity invested the queen with power of a very extraordinary nature; and she failed not to appreciate and exercise this power in governing the religion of her subjects.

This, however, was only a small portion of that vast power and authority with which her majesty was entrusted. Extraordinary as it may seem, her pliant parliament unwisely invested her with precisely the same authority in the church, as the pope had formerly usurped and enjoyed, which her majesty most explicitly claimed and exercised in the government of religion.* Dr. Burn, in allusion to this, observes; that the princes of this realm, intoxicated with that excess of power which the pope had assumed, would needs understand that the same was not extinguished, but only transferred from the popes to themselves: and they carried similar notions into the civil administration. "This," he adds, "excited disorders

* Strype's Whitgift, p. 260.

and convulsions in the state, and in the end overturned the government.”*

The statute of supremacy, framed by king Henry VIII., was revived, which enacted, “ That such jurisdiction, privileges, superiorities, and pre-eminences, spiritual and ecclesiastical, as by any spiritual or ecclesiastical power or authority, hath hitherto been or may lawfully be exercised or used, for the visitation of the ecclesiastical state and persons, and for reformation, order and correction of the same, and of all manner of errors, heresies, schisms, abuses, offences, contempts, and enormities, shall for ever by authority of this present parliament, be united and annexed to the imperial crown of this realm.”†

By this act, all persons, laity as well as clergy, who took upon them any preferment, at the Inns of court, either of the universities, or in the church, were bound to take the following remarkable oath: “ I do testify and declare in my conscience, that the queen’s highness is the only Supreme Governor of this realm, and of all other her highness’ dominions and countries, as well in all *spiritual* or *ecclesiastical* things, as temporal.—Therefore to my power I shall assist and defend all jurisdictions, privileges, pre-eminences, and authorities, granted or belonging to the queen’s highness, her heirs and successors, or united or annexed to the imperial crown of this realm.”

The archbishops and bishops were empowered to administer this extraordinary oath to all the clergy. The penalty and forfeiture on every instance of refusal to take this oath, was, for the first offence, the loss, during life, of all ecclesiastical promotions, benefices, and offices, and every temporal and lay promotion and office; for the second offence, to incur the penalties of premunire; and for the third offence, to *suffer death*, as if guilty of *high treason*!! ‡

This renowned act had placed king Henry in a similar situation as Nebuchadnezzar in ancient Babylon: “ Whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive; whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down.” So by

* Burn’s Eccl. Law, Dedic.

† Collier, vol. ii. p. 420.

‡ Strype’s Parker, p. 124.—Annals, vol. i. p. 69, 70.

this act queen Elizabeth was placed in the same rank, and invested with similar power to destroy all her subjects, who could not swallow the remarkable oath, and declare from their consciences that the queen was *the only spiritual governor* of the church of England, and also defend her majesty's jurisdiction in all ecclesiastical matters. By this statute she was authorized to enjoin upon her clergy what doctrines they should preach, what forms of worship should be observed throughout all her dominions, and what persons should enjoy all the high offices in the church. No convocation, or synod of the clergy, could assemble without her license, to sanction and give effect to their proceedings. Though her majesty had renounced the pretended infallibility of Rome, she was the very life and head of the church of England, and certainly stood in need of that infallibility to discharge her awful trust, so as to render it acceptable and well-pleasing to God. All power, ecclesiastical as well as civil, was lodged in the crown; the inconvenience of which the parliament and the nation soon felt, by the high hand with which she exercised her authority; but they felt it, alas! when it was too late to provide a remedy.

By one clause in this act, the queen and her successors were empowered to assign by their letters patent to such persons as they pleased being natural born subjects, and for as long a time as they pleased, the exercise under the crown of all spiritual or ecclesiastical jurisdiction. They had full power to nominate and appoint them "to use, occupy, and exercise all manner of jurisdictions, privileges, and pre-eminences, touching any spiritual or ecclesiastical jurisdiction within the realm of England and Ireland; to visit, reform, redress, order, correct, and amend all errors, heresies, schisms, abuses, offences, contempts, and enormities whatsoever."* Thus by this clause the ecclesiastical supremacy might at any time delegate ecclesiastical authority to other persons, according to the sovereign pleasure of the prince. Queen Elizabeth would never depreciate her rights and privileges; therefore, according to the power entrusted in her hands, she erected a new ecclesiastical court, called *The Court of HIGH COMMISSION*; and communicated to certain chosen persons all-sufficient authority for

* Strype, vol. i. p. 69.

regulating and governing the religion of her subjects. Nothing can be more explicit or comprehensive than the terms here used. The whole compass of church discipline and government was transferred to the crown, and made transferable from the crown, to the cognizance and regulation of others. By this new court, the religion of Britons was placed absolutely under the control of certain ecclesiastical commissioners: and by the exercise of its unlimited power and authority, this court was an engine of inconceivable oppression and mischief to multitudes of the queen's best subjects.

This celebrated act, however, met with very considerable opposition in passing the two houses of parliament. One of the members of the lower house reprobated its abominable intolerance, and said—"Though in the old law idolatry was punished with death; yet, since the coming of Christ, who came to win the world by peace, the greatest punishment taught by the apostles, was that of excommunication. Religion must be received by persuasion: it cannot be pressed by violence. The bishops, in the days of queen Mary, were bloodsuckers and murderers, worse than Caiaphas and Judas." He then said, that he wondered how the advocates of this bill could now wish to establish that as a law, which they had then considered so unlawful; and concluded by showing, that offenders in matters of religion were not to be punished by severe penal statutes, but to have secured to them liberty of conscience.*

The archbishop of York, in the upper house, said—"If this spiritual supremacy belongs to the king *as king*, as was lately affirmed in this house by a noble peer, then it must necessarily follow, that king Herod was supreme head of the church at Jerusalem, and Nero of that at Rome, notwithstanding they were both infidels. And if our Saviour Christ had not entrusted the apostles and their successors with the government of the church, but left it in the hands of temporal princes, it would have been a very slender provision. For by this reasoning, either the church must have been without head, till the reign of Constantine the Great, which was nearly three hundred years; or else this society must have been all along

* Strype's Parker, p. 124.

under the spiritual supremacy of *Pagan* emperors, who were no members of her communion, and often made it their business to extinguish Christianity.”*

Lord Montague opposed the bill, and having shown that it was unnecessary, he said—“ This law is neither just nor reasonable, nor can it deserve to be called by the name of law. It cannot be just to make this penal statute, to force the subjects of the realm to receive and believe the religion of *protestants on pain of death*. This is a thing unjust, and repugnant to the law of nature, and all civil laws. For naturally no man can be constrained to take for certain that which he holdeth to be uncertain. This is repugnant to the natural liberty of man’s understanding: the understanding may be persuaded, but not forced. It is sufficient for protestants to keep the profession of the churches, and the authority to preach and excommunicate; not to force and constrain men to do or believe, that which they believe not, and swear and make God witness of a lie. It is easy to understand, that a thing so unjust, and so contrary to all the reason and liberty of man, cannot be put in execution without great incommodity and difficulty. For what man is there so without courage, or void of all honour, who can consent to receive an opinion and new religion by force and compulsion, or who will swear that he thinketh contrary to what he thinketh? To be still may be borne, and suffered for a time; but to be compelled to lie and to swear, or else to die, are things that no man ought to endure.”†

Notwithstanding this opposition, the bill passed the two houses, and obtained the royal assent; upon which the queen and her delegates employed their zeal and power with great assiduity to promote the prosperity of the church. The archbishop of Canterbury, who was placed at the head of the high commission, having visited his diocese, found it in a most deplorable condition, and with grief made his report to the queen; but her majesty seemed at first to be much less concerned about this, than about maintaining her supremacy. She, therefore, ordered his grace to draw up a form of subscription for all ecclesiastical persons, in which they acknow-

* Collier, vol. ii. p. 421.

† Strype, vol. i. p. 296, 297.

ledged, "that the restoring of the supremacy to the crown, and the abolishing of all foreign power, as well as the administration of the sacraments according to the Book of Common-prayer, and the queen's injunctions, are agreeable to the word of God, and the practice of the primitive church !" The archbishop, at the same time, published an admonition to be set up in all the churches, forbidding all clergymen under the degree of master of arts, to preach or expound the Scriptures, or to innovate any thing, or use any other rite than was appointed by authority. But, seeing there were so few protestant ministers who had abilities, and no scruples, it was nearly impossible to observe this admonition.

The queen and the church being surrounded as with a bulwark, her majesty did not fail to exercise her supremacy, in which she discovered a very haughty spirit. Bishop Sandys having with grief beheld the superstitious people worshipping the royal idol in the queen's chapel, spoke to her highness about it; for which she was exceedingly offended, and threatened him with deprivation ! She exercised great tyranny even over the archbishop, threatening him with severer measures. His lordship writing to the secretary on this occasion, assured him, "that all the bishops had great reason to be dissatisfied with the queen ; that he repented having engaged in his present station ; that the treatment which he had met with from her majesty had entirely indisposed him for all business ; and that he could only mourn in the bitterness of his soul before God : but if she continued to force the clergy into a compliance, *they must obey God rather than men* ; and many of them had sufficient conscience and courage to sacrifice their lives in defence of their religion." This is a most excellent and honourable declaration ; but the queen had so much the spirit and principles of her royal father, that she even repented having afforded so much liberty to the reforming party !*

The convocation assembled by her majesty's royal license, to review the doctrine and discipline of the church, when the forty-two articles of king Edward were reduced to thirty-nine, as they now stand, without making any considerable variation in the doctrine. Having amicably settled the doctrinal articles,

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 425—427.

they proceeded to the discussion of ecclesiastical rites and ceremonies, upon which there were many warm debates, but no alterations adopted, or even proposed to the queen to be adopted. With this convocation the English reformation properly speaking, made a stand ; and the subsequent events were chiefly the clashing of different principles and different parties.

Many of those learned divines who had been exiles in the late reign, and were now preferred to bishoprics, discovered the true principles of the reformation, and used their utmost endeavours for the total rejection of the popish errors ; but all their efforts proved ineffectual. Grindal being appointed to the bishopric of London, “ remained under some scruples of conscience about some things, especially the habits and ceremonies required of bishops.” Mr. Strype affirms, that the Reformers of these times went *generally* upon this ground, that, in order to the complete freedom of the church of Christ from the errors and corruptions of Rome, every usage and custom practised by that apostate and idolatrous church ought to be abolished, with all their ceremonies and circumstances ; and that the service of God ought to be most simple, stripped of all that outward pomp and appearance that had been commonly used in popery, esteeming all that to be no better than *superstitious* and *antichristian*.* Among these Reformers were Grindal, Horne, Sandys, Jewel, and even Cox, with some others.†

These well-attested facts, so often contradicted by modern writers, necessarily remind us of the disgraceful troubles at Frankfurt, noticed in a former chapter. If these superstitious trifles were urged with such intolerant importunity, in a place where the laws and customs were repugnant to them, what was to be expected in England, where law and custom were on their side ? As these Coxian exiles showed themselves so stiff and unyielding when the matter was wholly in their own power ; and as some of them were so eager in wreathing a yoke about the consciences of their brethren, that they urged reluctant magistrates to rivet it ; is it any wonder that their applications for relief were cold and ineffectual, when made to rulers who were disposed to make the yoke still more severe, and to “ chastise

* Strype's Grindal, p. 25.

† Strype, vol. i. p. 177.

with scorpions those whom *they* had chastised with whips?" When, therefore, we consider the transactions at Frankfort, whence the most important principles were developed, we cannot be surprised at the defeat of every subsequent attempt to advance the English reformation, or even to procure relief to those who conscientiously scrupled conformity to the ecclesiastical impositions.

We are not unacquainted with the language which has been commonly used by the ruling party, when imposing on the consciences of the minority. But without urging here the danger of allowing to any class of rulers, civil or ecclesiastical, a power of enjoining indifferent things in religion; or the undeniable fact, that the burdensome system of ceremonial observances, by which religion was corrupted under the papacy, was gradually introduced under these and similar pretexts; or that the things in question, when properly considered, are not really matters of indifference: without insisting at present, upon these topics, the answer to all imposers is short and decisive. "These things appear matters of conscience and importance to the *scruplers*: the *imposers* say they are matters of indifference. Why then violate the sacred peace of the church, and perpetuate division; why silence, deprive, harass, and starve men of acknowledged learning and piety, and drive from communion a sober and devout people; why torture their consciences, and endanger their souls, by the imposition of things, which, in the imposer's own judgment, are indifferent, unnecessary, and unworthy of being subjects of contention?"

Men of Christian principles and tender consciences could not help feeling dissatisfied with the rigorous terms of conformity—more rigorous than had ever been heard of in any other protestant church. These intolerant impositions compelled men to become nonconformists; and while their respectability increased, their number multiplied in every part of the kingdom. This greatly displeased the queen; who commanded the governing prelates to adopt the most effectual methods, that none might be admitted to any ecclesiastical preferment, who would not formally promise conformity.

The queen addressed her letters to the two archbishops; in which she declared, that diversity, contention, and the love of singularity in ministers or people, was provoking to Almighty

God, grievous to her majesty, and ruinous to her people and country ! That her constant care had been to govern the realm by good laws and ordinances, in ecclesiastical as well as civil matters, by public officers, and as nearly as possible by *one rule*. That she had directed her people to obey humbly, and live godly, according to their several callings, in unity and concord, without diversity of opinions, or novelty of rites and manners. But that, to her great grief, she understood that in sundry places, and through the lack of her superior officers, suffering such varieties and novelties, there was crept into the church, a manifest disorder and offence to godly, wise, and obedient persons ; and the inconvenience was likely to grow as by an infection, as well to the annoyance and deformity of the whole nation, as to the interruption of Christian unity and charity. Her majesty, therefore, peremptorily commanded her metropolitan, according to the power and authority with which she had invested him, to confer with the other bishops, and, as the causes should require, to proceed by orders, injunctions, or censures, to maintain order and uniformity in all external ceremonies, to the honour of God and the edification of the people.*

The venerable primate, quickened by his royal mistress, and assisted by his brethren of the high commission, published the “ Advertisements,” with a view to secure the proposed object. By the first of these advertisements, all the preachers throughout the province of Canterbury were at once disqualified ; and by the last, they were required to subscribe and promise not to preach or expound the Scriptures, without a license from the bishop in whose diocese they lived, which could not be obtained without a protestation and promise under their hand of an absolute conformity to the ceremonies. And not less than *eight* protestations were required to be made and subscribed by all who should be admitted to any office or cure in the church.†

The approach of these severities was painfully alarming to the better part of the nation, and awakened the sympathy and concern of the reformed churches in other countries. As the bishops were about to enforce the use of the clerical habits,

* Strype, vol. i. p. 460, 461.

† Sparrow, p. 123—128.

dean Whittingham of Durham addressed a most pressing letter to the earl of Leicester, affectionately entreating him to employ his power and interest to prevent the approaching storm :

“ I understand they are about to compel us, contrary to our consciences, to wear the popish apparel, or deprive us of our ministry and livings. When I consider the weighty charge enjoined upon us by Almighty God, and the exact account we have to give of the right use and dispensation of his mysteries, I cannot doubt which to choose. He that would prove the use of the apparel to be a thing *indifferent*, and may be *imposed*, must prove that it tendeth to God’s glory ; that it agreeth with his word ; that it edifieth his church ; and that it maintaineth Christian liberty : but if it wanteth these things, then is it not indifferent, but hurtful. And how can God’s glory be advanced by those garments which antichristian superstition has invented to maintain and beautify idolatry ? What agreement can the superstitions of men have with the pure word of God ? What edification can there be, when the Spirit of God is grieved, the children of God discouraged, wicked papists confirmed, and a door opened for such popish traditions and antichristian impiety ? And can that be called true Christian liberty, where a yoke is laid on the necks of the disciples ; where the conscience is clogged with impositions ; where faithful preachers are threatened with deprivation ; where the regular dispensation of the word of God is interrupted ; where congregations are robbed of their learned and godly pastors ; and where the holy sacraments are made subject to superstitious and idolatrous vestments ?

“ Some will say, that the apparel is not designed to set forth popery, but for good policy. Will it then be deemed good policy, to deck the spouse of Christ with the ornaments of the Babylonish strumpet, or to force her faithful pastors to be decorated like superstitious papists ? God would not permit his people of old, to retain any of the Gentile manners for the sake of policy, but expressly forbade their imitation of them, and commanded them to destroy all the appurtenances of idolatry and superstition. And in the time of the Gospel, our Lord did not think it good policy, either to wear the pharisaical robes himself, or to suffer any of his disciples to do it ; but condemned it as altogether superstitious. When I con-

sider that Jeroboam maintained his calves in Dan and Beth-el, under the plausible name of policy, it makes me tremble to see the popish ornaments set forth under the same pretence. For if policy may serve as a cloak to superstition and papistry, then crowns and crosses, oil and cream, images and candles, palms and beads, with most of the other branches of antichrist, may be introduced.

“ It is well known, that when Hezekiah, Josiah, and other famous princes, promoted the reformation of religion according to the word of God, they compelled not the ministers of God to wear the apparel of Baal’s priests, but utterly destroyed all their vestments. Hezekiah commanded all the *appendages* of superstition and idolatry, to be carried out of the temple, and to be cast into Kedron. Josiah burnt all the vestments and other things belonging to Baal and his priests, not in Jerusalem, but out of the city. All this was done according to the word of the Lord, who commanded that not only the idols, but all things pertaining to them, should be abhorred and rejected. And if we compel the servants of Christ to conform unto the papists, I greatly fear we shall return again to popery.

“ Oh ! noble earl, be our patron and stay, that we may enjoy our liberty. Yield not to the triumphs of the pope, against Christ. If there be no hope of true reformation, let Christian liberty prevail against compulsion to evil. Pity the disconsolate churches. Hear the cries and groans of many thousands of God’s poor children, hungering and thirsting after spiritual food. I need not appeal to the word of God, to the history of the primitive church, to the just judgments of God poured out upon the nations for lack of true reformation. Let your own conscience judge between us and our enemies. And if we seek the glory of God alone, the enjoyment of true Christian liberty, the overthrow of all idolatry and superstition, and to win souls to Christ ; I beseech your honour to pity our case, and use your utmost endeavours to procure us our liberty.”*

To this admirable defence of the reformation and the rights of conscience, may be added the sentiments of bishop Pilkington of Durham, contained in his excellent letter written at this

* Strype’s Parker, Appen. p. 43.

time to the same noble person, in which he said—"I beseech your honour to consider how that all countries, that have reformed religion, have cast away the popish apparel with the pope; and yet we, who would be taken for the best, contend to keep it as a holy relic. Mark also, how many ministers there are in all counties, who are so zealous, not only to forsake the wicked doctrine of popery, but ready to leave their ministry and their livings, rather than be like the popish teachers of such superstitions, either in apparel or behaviour. This realm has such scarcity of teachers, that if so many worthy men should be cast out of the ministry, for such small matters, many places would be destitute of preachers; and it would give an incurable offence to all the favourers of God's truth in other countries. Shall we make that so precious, which other reformed churches deem so vile? God forbid. If we forsake popery as wicked, how shall we say their apparel becomes saints and professors of true holiness? St. Paul bids us refrain from *all outward show* of evil; but, surely, in keeping this popish apparel, we forbear not an outward show of *much evil*, if popery be judged evil. How Christian peace shall be kept in this church, when so many, for such small things, shall be thrust from their ministry and livings, it passes my simple wit to conceive."*

While these learned Reformers, with becoming zeal, pleaded the cause of Christian freedom, the university of Cambridge, alarmed at the approaching storm, was roused to imitate their example. The heads of houses, one of whom was even Dr. John Whitgift, addressed their humble supplication to the chancellor, under most alarming apprehensions. "A report has reached us," say they, "that for the future all the scholars of this university, will be forced to return to the old popish habits. This is daily mentioned to us by a great multitude of pious and learned men, who affirm, in their consciences, that they think every ornament of this kind is unlawful; and if the intended proclamation is enforced, they will be brought into the greatest danger. Lest our university should be forsaken, we think it is one of our first duties to acquaint you with this condition of ourselves and our brethren.

* Strype's Parker, Appen. p. 40.

And by these letters we most humbly beg, as well from your wisdom, as from your credit and favour with the queen's majesty, that you would intercede with her to withhold a proclamation of this kind. For, as far as we can see, there can be no danger or inconvenience in exempting us from this burden: but, on the contrary, we very much fear, that it will prove a hinderance to the preaching of the Gospel, and to literature. By your successful application to this, you will no doubt confer a great benefit, not only on us, but on the *nation at large*.*

The celebrated bishop Jewel, in his letters to Martyr and Bullinger, called the clerical habits "a stage dress," to which those alone were attached, who "had nothing else to recommend them to the people, but a *comical dress*." He engaged that no exertions of his should be wanting to have these "ludicrous fooleries and relics of the Amorites," as Martyr called them, altogether banished out of the church. And he "wished that the very slightest footsteps of popery might be removed out of the church, and minds of men; but the queen would at that time suffer no change in religion."† The common cry of the clergy then was, "We are killed in our souls, by this pollution of the bishops: we cannot perform our ministry in the singleness of our hearts."‡

It will appear extremely obvious from all these particulars, how the queen's ecclesiastical supremacy and government clashed with the principles, intentions, and objects of the learned Reformers. The impositions and severities were found to be great national grievances, exciting the strongest sympathy of the foreign reformed churches. The famous Beza wrote a long letter to bishop Grindal, exposing these intolerable abuses. "If they offend," says he, "who choose to leave their churches, rather than conform to rites and vestments against their consciences; a greater guilt is contracted by *those* who choose to deprive the flocks of able pastors, rather than suffer those pastors to make choice of their own apparel; or, choose to rob the people of the food of their *souls*, rather than suffer them to receive it otherwise than on their *knees*."

* Strype's Parker, Appen. p. 69, 70. † M'Crie's Knox, vol. i. p. 368.

‡ Strype's Parker, Appen. p. 77.

He signified, that this conformity was enforced, and the ministers were deprived, “not only for refusing those vestments which were peculiar to Baal’s priests, but also for not observing certain rites which had degenerated into most shameful superstitions.” He then asks, “what if ministers be commanded to wear the habits of buffoons or stage-players? But here something worse seems to be admitted; because *that* priestly habit is not only ridiculous to many papists themselves, but is defiled and polluted with infinite superstitions. Some will say, ‘it is ancient:’ it is so; but much more ancient is the apostolical simplicity, under which the church flourished.” He afterwards addressed all the bishops, exposing the great scandal and mischief of these rigorous measures, not only in the opinion of the common people, but according to the judgment of many persons eminent for learning and religion. He recommended them to provide some proper remedy for the removal of these evils; and charged the whole upon them, “as they would answer to the contrary at the judgment-seat of God, to whom an account must be given of the poorest sheep which should by these severities be forced to wander from the rest of the flock.”* In these letters, he showed the absurdity of the queen and her bishops having power to add new ceremonies, and order all ecclesiastical matters, while the pastors had no power allowed them, no not even to complain of their grievances. And he said, “he had not yet learned by what right, either the civil magistrate of himself might superinduce any new rites, or abrogate ancient ones; or that it was lawful for bishops alone to appoint any new thing in the church of Christ.”†

The celebrated Zanchy, professor of divinity in the university of Heidelberg, wrote, by order of the prince Elector of the Palatine, a most admirable epistle even to queen Elizabeth herself, containing the following expostulations upon these intolerant and disgraceful proceedings:

“To what end should those things be again brought into the church of God, by the commandment of the prince, which are contrary to the purity of the apostolic worship; which

* Strype’s Grindal, Appen. p. 39.—Heylin’s Pres. p. 38, 39.

† Strype’s Grindal, p. 113.

smell of popish superstition ; are neither for edification, or order, or ornament, or can bring any profit, but many evils to the church ? Whether is it better to follow the godly simplicity of the apostles, or the ungodly pomp of the papists ? The recalling of such popish garments will be found a greater evil, than peradventure may at first appear. The monks will cry aloud in the pulpits, and confirm their followers in ungodliness, by the example of your gracious majesty. ‘ What ! they will say, doth not even the queen of England, a most learned and prudent princess, begin by little and little to come back to the religion of the holy church of Rome ? We are to live in good hope that the day will come wherein she will also recall all the other rites and sacraments of holy church.’ What said the prophet to king Jehosaphat, when he helped Ahab ? ‘ Darest thou help the wicked, and love those who hate the Lord ? For this thing the wrath of the Lord is upon thee.’

“ Such garments ought not to be thrust upon the church of Christ, because the harlot of Rome hath abused, and doth still abuse them to evil, and to cover her fornications, or entice men to commit fornication. All these popish pomps and ceremonies are devised to allure men to commit spiritual fornication. Is it not, therefore, filthy and dishonourable to have these things in the church of Christ ? If the brazen serpent, which had been ordained of God, and for the great benefit of the Israelites, was taken away by good king Hezekiah, because the people had abused it contrary to the word of God ; and if Hezekiah be highly commended for so doing ; how much more are these unclean garments to be banished out of the church of God ; seeing the apostles never used them, but the whore of Rome in her idolatrous worship, even to seduce the people ?

“ What shall I say of the consciences of Christians ? It is manifest that they are greatly troubled with this commandment ; and they so greatly complain, that their lamenting voices and groans are heard in Germany. How grievous and distasteful an offence it is to trouble the consciences of the godly, the holy Scripture showeth : when it commandeth not to offend the weak ; when it threateneth grievous punishments against those who fear not these things ; and when it propoundeth the examples of the saints, especially of Paul, who says : ‘ If meat

offend my brother, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth; that I may not offend my brother.'”*

The church of Scotland sent, at the same time, a most affectionate and pressing letter “to their brethren the bishops and pastors of England,” exposing the evil of persecution, and recommending peace and forbearance among brethren. “It is come to our knowledge,” say they, “that divers of our dearest brethren, among whom are some of the best learned in the realm, are deprived from the ecclesiastical function, and forbidden to preach, by you who are straitly to promote the kingdom of Jesus Christ; because their consciences will not suffer them to use such garments as idolaters, in time of blindness, have used in their idolatry; which cannot but be most dolorous to our hearts. We crave in the bowels of Jesus Christ, that Christian charity may prevail among you. You cannot be ignorant how tender a thing the conscience of man is. All that have knowledge are not alike persuaded. Your consciences revolt not at wearing such garments; but many thousands, both learned and godly, are otherwise persuaded. If then the surplice, corner cap, and tippet, have been badges of idolatry, and used in the very act of idolatry, what hath the preacher of Christian liberty, and the open rebuker of all superstition, to do with the dregs of that Romish beast? Our brethren who of conscience refuse that unprofitable apparel, do neither condemn, nor molest you, who use such vain trifles. If you would do the like to them, we doubt not that you will please God, and comfort the hearts of many, which are wounded by the present extremities. We charitably desire you to remember that sentence of pity: ‘Feed the flock of God, which is committed to your charge, caring for them, not by constraint, but willingly; not as though ye were lords over God’s heritage, but that ye may be examples to the flock.’ Therefore we think that you should boldly oppose, not only all power that dare extol itself against God, but also all such as burden the consciences of the faithful, more than God hath burdened them in his word.”†

These are noble defences of the reformation, as well as of Christian freedom and the rights of conscience. They disco-

* Fresh Suit, Appen. p. 43—58.

† Troubles at Frankfort, p. 181.

ver, as in the light of day, the great arrogance and usurpation of all ecclesiastical impositions ; and, while they clearly show the folly and wickedness of all attempts to coerce the people to adopt religious opinions or practice, they demonstrate the power to be a dangerous and antichristian assumption. The ecclesiastical supremacy of queen Elizabeth was an open rebellion against the ecclesiastical supremacy which previously existed in England, and which governed all the churches in the land ; and on this account the pope, as well as all the advocates of popery, have stigmatized this noble princess as a schismatic, a heretic, and a rebel ; nor, on her own lofty claims, was it easy to refute the dangerous logic. The power assumed by her majesty when she claimed ecclesiastical supremacy over the understandings and consciences of all her subjects, and in all things pertaining to religion and the worship of God, was an assumption equally dangerous, and an usurpation equally antichristian, as any power assumed and exercised by the Roman pontiff. Though it was confined within the boundaries of a single kingdom, or was never actually carried to the same degree of extravagance, and she was not prompted to commit so large a share of iniquity ; her pretended supremacy invested her with all-sufficient power to seize the property and destroy the lives of all her subjects, who scrupled obedience to her sovereign commands in things spiritual. An assumption more palpably dangerous, or less supported by truth, was never visible in the chair of St. Peter.

Her majesty having prepared her injunctions to the number of fifty-three, entered upon a general visitation of the churches throughout the kingdom. Those whom the queen employed in drawing them up, however, found considerable difficulty upon the point of retaining images in the churches. Her majesty was strongly inclined to retain them, not only as matter of pomp and magnificence, and to excite devotion, but also to conciliate the bigoted and superstitious people to the new religion. Indeed it was not without a kind of protestation from the reformed divines, that the queen consented to have the images removed by one of these injunctions : but she would not part with her own altar, or her crucifix, or with the lights burning before it, or her three bishops who officiated all

in rich copes before the idol.* The gentlemen and choristers of the royal chapel appeared in their surplices, and the priests in their copes; the altar was furnished with rich plate, with gilt candlesticks, lighted candles, and a massy crucifix in the middle. The public service was sung, not only with organs, but with cornets, sackbuts, and psaltery, on the solemn festivals. In short, the service of the royal chapel, and in some cathedrals, was scarcely to be distinguished from the popish service, except that it was performed in the English tongue. In open violation of these glaring facts, detailed at length on the page of history, numerous modern publications are incessantly extolling the *pure* and *perfect* reformation of the church; and, alas! the people, without examination, believe them. This great conformity to the Romish church succeeded very much according to her majesty's wishes. For by this means, many of the catholics being allured to conformity, attended regularly upon the public service of the church for nine or ten years; till the pope, having lost all hope of an accommodation, prohibited the practice, by excommunicating the queen, and laying the kingdom under his papal curse."†

Upon the breaking forth of the controversy of these times, there was no dispute among the Reformers upon points of doctrine; and if other ecclesiastical matters had been left indifferent, as they ought to have been left, the seeds of discord and division would have been prevented. But as the case then stood, by making so many indifferent things *indispensably necessary*, it was almost miraculous that the reformation did not revert to popery; and if some of the scrupulous Reformers had not in part complied, in hope of the removal of existing abuses at some future period, that would most probably have been the unhappy consequence. Many of the churches were unfurnished with ministers; and not a few unlearned mechanics were preferred to livings and dignities, "who were disregarded by the people, and did the reformation more harm than good:" while others of the first rank, for learning, piety, and usefulness, were cast aside as useless, merely because they scrupled conformity. The learned prelates saw and acknowledged these facts; but no terms of Christian union could be obtained.‡

* Burnet, vol. iii. p. 292.

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 419.

‡ Ibid. p. 424.

The queen, placed in her high situation, was exceedingly offended at many of her learned subjects, who could not measure their faith by the political standard, nor observe all things commanded by the act of uniformity; but to remedy this evil, her majesty addressed letters to archbishop Parker, commanding him, with the other bishops, to suppress all the existing varieties and diversities among both the clergy and laity, and bring all to one uniform religion throughout the realm. Addresses from such high authority never failed to gain attention. The prelates were immediately roused to action; and though this imagined uniformity was as useless, as it was impracticable, so long as men could not think and believe alike; yet they used their most vigorous efforts to fulfil her royal wishes.* Being resolved to reduce the church, with all its members, to one uniform order, they cited many of the clergy, in town and country, to appear before them, some of whom at first they admonished, and threatened others. To secure this imaginary uniformity, many were suspended and deprived, and others were cast into prison, who, having wives and children, laboured under great poverty and distress; and many being driven from their ministerial employment, to procure a livelihood elsewhere, betook themselves to trades, to husbandry, or went to sea. The result of these uncatholic proceedings was not a perfect uniformity, as was proposed and anticipated, but multitudes of churches were shut up for want of ministers, and the souls of the people were left to perish for lack of knowledge. This, said the archbishop, was no more than he foresaw before he began; and that when the queen appointed him to pursue these measures, he told her majesty, that these precise people would suffer the loss of their goods, and their bodies to be cast into prison, rather than they would relent.†

Under these extremities, many of the scrupulous puritans, as in the days of queen Mary, withdrew from the national church, and set up their own separate assemblies. They laid aside the ecclesiastical ceremonies and Book of Common-prayer, and worshipped God in a way which to them appeared more agreeable to his holy word. The nonconformists were considered of two kinds. The one class would not wear the clerical

* Strype's Parker, p. 155. † Strype's Grindal, p. 99.—Parker, p. 225.

habits, nor subscribe to the ceremonies ; yet they held communion with the church, and willingly and devoutly joined in the public service. The others disliked the very *constitution* of the political church, charging it with many gross remainders of popery, that it was full of antichristian corruptions, and not to be tolerated among Christians.* These were constrained to a total separation ; for which they assigned this reason ; —“ That the ceremonies of antichrist were so tied to the service of God, that no one might preach, or administer the sacraments without them, being compelled to observe them by law.” Had all indifferent things been left discretionary, and not been made indispensably necessary, both ministers and people would at this early period no doubt have been satisfied. But, seeing this was denied, they entered into a solemn consultation, and, after mature deliberation, came to this conclusion ; —“ That, since they could not have the word of God preached, nor the sacraments administered, without *idolatrous gear* ; and since there had been a separate congregation in London, and another at Geneva, in queen Mary’s time, which used a book and order of preaching, administration of the sacraments, and discipline, which the great Mr. Calvin approved, and which was freed from the superstitions of the English service : that therefore it was their duty, in their present circumstances, to break off from the public churches, and to assemble as they had opportunity in private houses, or elsewhere, to worship God in a manner that might not offend their consciences.”†

This was about the year 1566, and was the era of that SEPARATION from the church of England which continues to this day. This is said to have been a most unhappy event, whereby people of the same country, the same religion, and the same faith, separated communion ; the one part being obliged to retire into private houses and secret chambers, to serve and worship God alone ; which begat strangeness among neighbours, christians, and protestants.‡ That this was a most unhappy event, and an event ever to be deplored by all sincere protestants, will never be questioned ; but who

* Strype’s Grindal, p. 114. † Strype’s Parker, p. 241.—Parte of Regis, p. 25.

‡ Strype’s Parker, p. 241.

were the aggressors? And who drove their brethren to these extremities? Why were not certain amendments made in the liturgy, by which conscientious persons might have been made easy, or, even liberty granted them to worship God in their own way? Were not the rights of conscience, and of private judgment, the undeniable privileges of man, as well in the reign of queen Elizabeth, as they had been in the days of her sister Mary, or as they had been in the primitive churches, or as they are at the present day?

It ought, moreover, to be recollected, that those who separated from the established assemblies, did not force and compel their fellow Christians into their way, by thundering temporal pains and penalties; they only claimed their unalienable birthright of thinking, and deciding, and acting for themselves, in things pertaining to the worship of God, and the salvation of their souls, which nearly all protestants admit in theory, but deny in practice: they claim it for themselves, but deny it to others. While they firmly maintained their principles, they generously allowed all others to do the same; and thus they realized the only honourable and genuine principles of religious freedom. While they appreciated the blessing of religious liberty, they made no pretensions to dictation or authority over the understandings and consciences of their brethren. Though they disliked the very *constitution* of the political church, with all its corruptions, and the shameful intolerance by which they were upheld; their principles and practice are, surely, not to be condemned on these grounds, but to be admired and imitated by all discerning protestants.

Their religious principles, it is acknowledged, were not formed according to the model of the ecclesiastical establishment; and notwithstanding the terrific thunderings of the act of uniformity, and the intolerant proceedings of the bishops, they held their private assemblies as they found opportunity. They trod in the footsteps of the protestant congregations in the reign of queen Mary; and, to avoid the discovery of their watchful enemies, they often assembled in the fields and woods, in the neighbourhood of London.* They were after some time discovered, and the congregation broken up, when about one

* Heylin's Pres. p. 259.

hundred were assembled ; many of whom were taken into custody, and sent to Bridewell, the Compter, and other prisons. Having remained in prison nearly two years, and their patience and constancy being sufficiently tried, they were at length released by order of the council.*

The severe laws enacted, and the intolerant measures pursued, to promote one uniform ecclesiastical order, could not fail to increase the number of nonconformists among all persons of sober reflection. Men of sound judgments and tender consciences, could not be compelled by any human power to receive a legislative religion, as of divine inspiration and directly from God. The growth of nonconformity gave great offence to the queen ; and in her zeal for her supremacy and her church, she wrote again to archbishop Parker, saying—“ We required you, as the metropolitan of our realm, and as the principal person in our ecclesiastical commission, to have good regard that such uniform order in the divine service and rules of the church might be kept, as by the laws in that behalf is provided, and by our injunctions also declared and explained : and that you should call to your assistance certain of our bishops, to reform the abuses and disorders of sundry persons, seeking to make alterations. We minding earnestly to have a perfect reformation of all abuses or attempts to deform the uniformity prescribed, and that none shall be suffered to decline, on the right hand or the left, from the line limited by authority ; do earnestly by our authority royal, will and charge you by all lawful means to proceed herein as you have begun.”†

This attempt demonstrated the imperfection and insufficiency of the pretended supremacy. Multitudes of her majesty's subjects still scrupled to measure their religion by the maxims of the state, and to yield their understandings and souls in slavish subjection to the dogmas of politicians. Her majesty next issued her royal proclamation, in which she “ charged and commanded all archbishops and bishops, and all justices of assize, and all mayors, head officers of cities and towns corporate, and all others who had any authority, to put in execution the Act for the Uniformity of Common-prayer, with all

* Strype's Grindal, p. 136.

† Strype's Parker, p. 330.

diligence and severity, neither favouring nor dissembling with one person or other, who did neglect, despise, or seek to alter the godly orders and rites set forth in the said Book." This the royal lady commanded them to observe, "upon pain of her majesty's high displeasure, and deprivation of their dignities and benefices or *other* censures."*

By this proclamation the queen discovered her great concern and fixed resolution to uphold every stone and brick, every nail and pin, of her beloved church. She followed this proclamation with separate commissions to the bishops of the different dioceses, and other persons in the various counties; commanding them to make every possible inquiry after nonconformists, to cite them before them, to hear and determine their respective causes, and to inflict upon them deserved punishment. But to awaken the commissioners to a discharge of their duties, the lord Treasurer delivered her majesty's message to them in the star-chamber, commanding them to execute their important trust with fidelity. "Her majesty," said he, "will have you all to understand, that as she herself cannot be *quiet in her conscience*, without earnestly prosecuting this reformation; so shall she not think that any of her subjects, and especially such as have authority to execute her laws, worthy to *live under her protection*, or in anywise to *enjoy her favour*, who shall directly or indirectly maintain any person to alter or change, by *example* or *doctrine*, the orders of the church established by her laws."†

In this extraordinary message, the royal supremacy no doubt breathed its native air, and pourtrayed its own true character. We shall not inquire how nearly the peace of her majesty's conscience was connected with the infliction of the cruel and shocking sentences in the acts of uniformity and supremacy, for the most trivial and insignificant offences; but that all persons were unworthy of *life*, or of her *favour*, who should maintain any other thing directly or indirectly, or who might seek, by their *example* or *doctrine*, for an alteration of the existing ecclesiastical orders, is one of the most illiberal and barbarous sentiments to be found on the page of history. The inhumanities of Rome could not develope a principle more

* Sparrow, p. 167, 170.

† Strype's Parker, p. 447, 457.

despotic or unjust, more destructive of the rights of conscience, or more opposed to Christianity.

Elizabeth did not proclaim opinions without meaning. Her message contained the expressions of her royal heart. This appeared whenever her unbounded supremacy was brought to the test. She narrowly watched the Inns of Court, where better principles had taken deep root among the learned in the law, and gave her royal directions for suppressing every deviation from her beloved uniformity. She sequestered the venerable benchers from the exercise of their profession, until they gave satisfactory proof of their conformity in ecclesiastical matters.* She carried her matchless power even within the walls of the two houses of parliament. A motion being made in the lower house for a reformation of the ecclesiastical laws, which was supported with great firmness by some of the ablest statesmen, was no sooner become the subject of public discussion, than the queen took great offence, and forbade the house to concern itself about such matters.† Mr. Strickland, a very ancient and respectable member, who offered the motion, having affirmed that the Book of Common-prayer, with some other superstitious remains of popery, might with ease be altered without the least danger to religion; the treasurer of her majesty's household stood up and replied, "that all matters of ceremony were to be referred to the queen, and for them to meddle with the royal prerogative was not convenient." Her majesty was so exceedingly displeased with the house, but especially with Mr. Strickland's motion, that she summoned him before the council, and forbade his attendance in parliament; but the members were so alarmed at this bold attack upon their rights and privileges, and made so many warm speeches against the queen's tyrannical abuse of their submission, that she thought proper to restore him to his place.‡

Upon this encroachment on the rights of parliament, a very respectable member said, that the precedent was dangerous; and that all matters not treason, or to the derogation of the crown, were tolerable in that house; where all things were to be considered, and where there was such fulness of power, that

* Lansdowne's MSS. vol. xv. no. 71, 74.

† D'Ewes, p. 185.

‡ D'Ewes, p. 156.—Warner, vol. ii. p. 438.

even the right of the crown was to be determined. He moreover affirmed, that to say the parliament had no power to determine of the crown, was high treason ; and reminded them that they were there not to promote their own private interest, but the interest of the country. He agreed that princes ought to have their prerogative ; but he maintained that it ought to be limited. He said that the queen could not of herself make laws ; neither might she, for the same reason, break them. The speech that had been made, and the bill that had been offered, he said, were not to be condemned ; adding, “ that if there were any things in the Book of Common-prayer, either Jewish, Turkish, or Popish, they ought to be reformed.”*

At the opening of the next parliament, the lord-keeper recommended the two houses, “ to see that the laws relating to the discipline and ceremonies of the church were put in execution ; and if any further laws were wanting, that they should consider of them ; so the civil sword will support the ecclesiastical, as aforetime.” The commons, however, having observed how shamefully the queen and her bishops had abused their pretended spiritual power, instead of making new laws to support or strengthen it, ordered two bills to be brought into the house, to regulate the ecclesiastical ceremonies, and to ease the burdens of the oppressed puritans. The bills passed smoothly through the commons, and were referred to a committee of both houses ; upon which the queen was enraged to find her supremacy thus invaded, and sent a message to the house by the speaker, “ That it was her pleasure no bills concerning religion should henceforth be preferred or read in that house, unless the same should be first considered and approved by her bishops, or convocation : and she commanded them to deliver up the two bills last read in the house relating to rites and ceremonies !” Notwithstanding this high strain of the prerogative, which struck so dreadful a blow at the freedom of parliaments, the commons were so intimidated by the haughty and despotic message, that with great servility, they not only sent her majesty the bills, but begged that she would not conceive an ill opinion of them for what they had done. The queen returned a message, in which she signified her utter

* D'Ewes, p. 176.

dislike of the former of the two bills, and of him who had introduced it ; but, to keep the supreme spiritual authority in her own hands, she added—"That she would, as Defender of the Faith, aid and maintain all good protestants, to the discouragement of papists."*

Another parliament having assembled, the house of commons agreed to meet in the Temple-church, on the Lord's day fortnight after the motion was made ; "to have preaching, and to join together in prayer, with fasting and humiliation, for the assistance of God's Spirit in all their consultations, and for the preservation of the queen's majesty and her realm." In order to guard against all offence, and to prevent if possible all ground of suspicion, the house referred the nomination of the preacher to those members who belonged to her majesty's privy-council. The reader will probably see nothing in this vote contrary to law, or to the queen's prerogative : but her majesty was no sooner acquainted with the vote of the commons, than she sent sir Christopher Hatton with her message ; "That she was much surprised at so great a rashness in that house, by thus invading her ecclesiastical supremacy, without her privy and pleasure first made known to them." This message occasioned many warm debates, as an infringement on the liberties of the house ; but at length it was moved and carried, that the commons should acknowledge their offence to her majesty, and humbly crave forgiveness ! Hatton having reported to the house the queen's acceptance of their submission, told them from her majesty, that she did not dislike their inclination to fasting and prayer ; but she was "disobliged at their *presuming to appoint their own devotions*, without acquainting her with it, and receiving her orders for it !"† This will give the reader some idea of the state of religious liberty under the supremacy of Elizabeth, who commanded her subjects, even the whole commons' house of parliament, that they should not offer up their prayers to God in public without consulting her sovereign pleasure !

These arbitrary proceedings awakened a noble spirit of liberty among the commons, when many bold speeches were made in defence of the birthright of Englishmen. Mr. Peter

* Strype's Parker, p. 394, 395.

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 450.

Wentworth said, that it grieved him to see how many ways the freedom of parliament had been infringed. At one time, it was rumoured through the house, said he, “take heed what you do; the queen liketh not such a matter; and she will be offended with those who prosecute it:” at another, a message is brought from her majesty, prohibiting our proceedings.

Mr. Wentworth afterwards made a motion, to address the queen to name her successor, which was immediately supported by three respectable members: but her majesty hearing of what they had done, sent for the four members, and committed them prisoners to the tower, where the proposer of the motion remained several years. The reader who is most partial to the memory of Elizabeth, will no doubt acknowledge that this was a stretch of her prerogative, and as contrary to law and justice, as it was hostile to the freedom of parliament. That which followed upon this case was, however, still more extraordinary. When the house moved to address the queen for the release of their members, her favourites answered—“that her majesty had committed them for causes best known to herself; that the house must not call the queen to account for what she did by her royal authority; that the causes of their restraint might be highly dangerous; that her majesty did not like such questions, nor did it become the house to deal in such matters !”* Sir Christopher Hatton, who was no stranger to her majesty’s intentions, informed the house, that he supposed those gentlemen were committed, not for any thing that concerned the privileges of the house, but for encroaching upon the queen’s title and prerogative, as supreme governor in causes ecclesiastical, and intermeddling with matters touching the church !†

Her majesty did not confine her royal attention to the commons, but extended her unbounded sovereignty within the walls of the upper house. She undertook to give them religious instruction, especially the lords spiritual, threatening to depose them if they refused to observe her royal commands. Addressing them, at the close of one of her parliaments, she said—“One matter toucheth me so near, that I may not oversee it;” that is, “religion, the ground on which all other mat-

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 441, 463.

† Strype’s Whitgift, p. 256.

ters ought to take root, and being corrupted may mar all the tree. There are some who find fault with the order of the clergy, and so make a slander to myself and the church, whose *overruler* God hath made me, whose negligence cannot be excused, if any schisms or heretical errors were suffered. Thus much I must say, that there may be some faults and negligences, as in all other great charges, and what vocation is without? All of which if you, my lords of the clergy, do not amend, *I will depose you*. Look ye, therefore, well to your charges: this may be amended without heedless or open exclamations." And upon the privilege of the parliament, she informed the lords temporal and spiritual, that they must not speak what they pleased, but only say "yes or no" upon subjects laid before them!*

While the queen was insulting the two houses of parliament, a petition was presented to her majesty, that the inferior clergy might be admitted members in the house of commons. The measure, say they, "would much repair the credit and reputation of the clergy, which is now exposed to great contempt; and the wise and religious may observe, that the contempt of the clergy is the high road to atheism and profaneness. It would greatly tend also to the glory of God, the good of the land, and the honour of your majesty, if it shall please your majesty to admit a portion of the clergy into that house, where they may stand for the godly government now established, against all innovations of popery, or puritanism. And her majesty will be sure of a greater number in that assembly, who will ever be most ready to maintain her prerogative, and to enact whatsoever may be most for her highness' safety and content, as the men who next under God depend upon her princely clemency and protection."† This measure, however, was rejected.

The religious exercises, called prophecyings, had been promoted for some time throughout the country, to the unspeakable satisfaction of all good people. Good archbishop Grindal, persuaded of their vast utility, greatly encouraged them. He found them to be particularly serviceable to the interests of religion, and that while they greatly improved both the clergy

* D'Ewes, p. 328, 460.

† Burnet, vol. ii. Rec. p. 120, 121.

and the laity in the knowledge of the Scriptures, they were a strong bulwark in defence of the reformation. But to prevent all disorders in these exercises, and to render them perfectly unexceptionable to the higher powers, he drew up a number of regulations, which gave entire satisfaction to all persons of moderation. They were in fact meetings of the parochial clergy, appointed for mutual improvement in the exposition of the Scriptures. The method observed in conducting these assemblies was unexceptionable. The clergy within a certain prescribed district met on the day and at the place previously fixed; when the most grave and learned minister, appointed by the bishop, presided; then every minister present, beginning at the youngest, successively expounded some text of Scripture, showing the true sense of it, the propriety of the words, the diversity of interpretation, the virtues enjoined, and the vices prohibited. The laity were never suffered to speak, nor any clergyman, until he had been licensed by the bishop.* Her majesty, however, being of a different opinion from the archbishop, sent for the venerable primate, and exclaimed against the prophecyings, as illegal, and dangerous both to church and state, commanding him peremptorily to suppress them! On this occasion she particularly declared, that she was offended at the great number of preachers, that it was good for the church to have *few* preachers, that three or four were sufficient for a county, that the reading of homilies was all that was necessary, and, in short, she commanded him with considerable sharpness to *abridge* the number of preachers, as well as put down the exercises.

This extraordinary measure placed the pious archbishop in a most painful situation, not much dissimilar to that of the prophet Daniel; for he must act in direct violation of his judgment and his conscience, or assuredly incur the anger of his prince. The queen was vehement in her orders, and even refused to hear the primate's answer, with apparent tokens of great displeasure. But the archbishop, instead of giving directions to his archdeacon and vicar-general, to execute her majesty's command, wrote the queen a long and admirable letter, showing the necessity and usefulness of preaching in all

* Strype's Grindal, p. 220, 221.

the churches, and the benefit of the exercises, which were not illegal as her majesty supposed.

There was a spirit in this letter which Elizabeth had not been accustomed to observe in her subjects, and which she would not bear from any of them. The venerable primate of all England should not dare to address her with honest freedom, by giving his advice upon points purely religious, or by disputing her all-wise commands, without incurring her royal indignation. Inflamed, therefore, with his letter, she resolved to make a public example of the archbishop, as a terror to others; and the honest prelate was, accordingly, confined as a prisoner in his own house, and sequestered from his archiepiscopal jurisdiction for six months. There was on this occasion an open display of the royal power, and of the vengeance with which it was exercised; when the head of the church, who was a woman, thus undertook to decide so peremptorily upon a point purely spiritual, without even consulting her spiritual counsellors, and to imprison and tie the hands of the primate, because he disapproved of her decision. Before the six months were elapsed, the archbishop was recommended to make his submission to the queen, which he did as far as was consistent with his station and integrity: but being unwilling to retract his opinion, or to confess his sorrow for the counsel he had given her majesty, there was much talk of depriving him, which being thought too severe, his sequestration was continued. The attempt to inflict upon him the sentence of deprivation was, indeed, very much resented by the true protestants at court; and Sir Francis Kollys, treasurer of her majesty's household, said—"If the archbishop of Canterbury shall be deprived, then up starts the pride and practice of the papists, and down with the comfort and strength of her majesty's safety." The queen, therefore, by her letters to the bishops put down the religious exercises, which were so well calculated to promote Christian knowledge and piety, not only when they were both at a very low ebb, but when the popish missionaries were making numerous proselytes from the church in every corner of the land.*

The queen having thus insulted the venerable primate, we

* Strype's Grindal, p. 221—239.—Warner, vol. ii. p. 447—450.

cannot wonder at her treating the other bishops with similar contempt. Fletcher, bishop of London, was among those who incurred her majesty's displeasure, and felt the indignation of her royal power. Being a widower at the time of his translation to London, he presently after married a widow lady, sister to Sir George Gifford; and, though he was a thorough courtier, and one of the queen's chaplains, for the significant crime of his aged and episcopal marriage, her majesty banished him from the court, and commanded him to be suspended; upon which he was actually suspended from his episcopal and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. His lordship groaned under her majesty's displeasure for the space of six months, after which, by the intercession of friends, she was graciously pleased to extend her royal pardon, and restore him to the episcopal function.*

Her majesty's ecclesiastical government had no bounds; and it was, in several instances, deeply stained with blood. In the year 1575, a congregation of Dutchmen, stigmatized anabaptists, was discovered in London; *twenty-seven* of whom were apprehended and cast into prison, and four, bearing fagots at Paul's cross, recanted their opinions. Eleven received the sentence of death; one was afterwards frightened into a recantation; eight were banished from the kingdom; and two were committed to the flames in Smithfield. The Dutch congregation affectionately interceded for their lives, also the venerable John Fox, who wrote a most pathetic letter to the queen, in which he says—To punish with the flames, the bodies of those who err from ignorance, rather than obstinacy, is cruel, and more like the church of Rome, than the mildness of the Gospel. I do not write thus, he adds, from any bias to the indulgence of error; but to save the lives of men, being myself a man; and in hope that the offending parties may have an opportunity to repent, and retract their mistakes. He then earnestly entreats that the fires of Smithfield might not be rekindled; but that some milder punishment might be inflicted upon them, to prevent if possible, the destruction of their souls, as well as their bodies. But his generous and affectionate remonstrances were ineffectual. The queen remained inflexible, and absolutely refused to save their lives,

* Strype's Whitgift, p. 428, 429.

unless they would retract their opinions : but, remaining steadfast, the two poor men perfumed Smithfield with their ashes.*

This slaughter and blood was not confined to foreigners, but extended to her majesty's natural born subjects. In the year 1579, Matthew Hament, a plough-wright at Hethersett, near Norwich, being suspected of holding unsound and dangerous opinions, was convened before the bishop of Norwich, and condemned as a heretic ; upon which, both his ears were cut off, and, the week following, he was committed to the flames in the castle-ditch.† Mr. John Lewis, about four years after, was condemned and burnt at Norwich, for holding heretical opinions. Mr. Francis Kett, a man of learning, and master of arts in one of the universities, was also convened before his lordship of Norwich ; and for holding various heretical opinions, he was condemned and burnt near the city of Norwich. The right reverend prelate after condemning this heretic, being desirous of his speedy execution, addressed the following short letter to lord Burleigh, as transcribed from the original in manuscript :—" I have lately condemned for heresies one Francis Kett, M. A., with whose blasphemous opinions I thought good to acquaint your honour, referring to your wisdom his speedy execution, being so dangerous a person. So I commit your lordship to the grace of God, with my hearty prayers for your honour !"‡—The reader will not be a little surprised when he is informed that this protestant prelate was none other than Dr. Edmund Scambler, formerly one of the pastors of the protestant congregation in London, during the persecution of queen Mary !

It is certainly a very easy thing to stigmatize any class of men with the odious name of *heretics*, and equally easy for those in power to commit them to the flames. The prelates and government of queen Elizabeth adopted these salutary measures against those who could not think and believe in matters of religion according to the prescriptions of the state : this, however, was no commendation of their protestant profession. As to the Roman catholics, when the claim of their church's infallibility is once admitted, all who disbelieve her

* Heylin's Pres. p. 279, 280.

† Ibid. p. 281.

‡ Lansdowne's MSS. vol. lvii. no. 75.

doctrine must, of course, be heretics. This consequence is sufficiently natural. But, with what degree of decency or consistency can any sect of protestants, who disclaim all pretensions to infallibility, accuse and burn, as heretics, such of their fellow protestants as may entertain religious sentiments different from their own? When they act thus, though they may deny all pretensions to infallibility in *words*, they certainly claim it in *fact*. If they be not infallible, how can they, nay, how dare they, burn men for their religious opinions? The principal difference upon this point, between the Roman catholics, and those protestants who anathematize their brethren for difference of opinion, seems to be only this: the church of Rome is *infallible*, and *they are always right*.

While the foregoing unnatural punishments were inflicted on men for their erroneous opinions, the sin of nonconformity was treated with equal severity as that of heresy or felony. We have already adverted to the affecting cases of Barrow, Greenwood and Penry, who were all hanged for nonconformity, and to that of the pious and learned Udal, who died in prison. Mr. William Denny was executed for the same offence, at Thetford in Norfolk. Mr. John Copping and Mr. Elias Thacker, two pious Suffolk ministers, were cast into prison by the bishop of Norwich for nonconformity; and having endured a painful confinement for *seven years*, and refusing to retract their principles, they were both condemned, and hanged at Bury St. Edmunds.* Upon the long and miserable imprisonment of these two sufferers, four respectable justices of the peace frequently petitioned their judges to pardon them; and when there was no hope of this, they became earnest suitors to the bishop and others, that the two ministers might be removed from the prison at Bury; but in all their generous efforts they utterly failed. The bishop would not allow the prisoners the least favour, or exercise the smallest degree of lenity; but, extraordinary as it may seem, this unfeeling prelate sent accusations to the court against the four justices, for this extension of their sympathy and humanity!†

While these protestant prelates were murdering innocent and harmless Christians in the country, the archbishop of

* Strype, vol. ii. p. 532, iii. 186.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 20. Appen. p. 7.

Canterbury and the bishop of London were destroying them in the metropolis. From a list of faithful Christians whom they cast into prison, "for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," we find that Henry Thompson and George Collier were committed to the Clink by the bishop of London, for hearing Mr. Greenwood read a portion of Scripture at a friend's house on the Lord's day ; where they remained prisoners nineteen months without being called to trial. Jerome Studley was sent by his lordship to the Compter, for refusing to answer interrogatories, where he remained fifteen months. Christopher Roper was committed close prisoner by the bishop of London. Edward Boys was nineteen months in Bridewell, and then close prisoner in the Clink. John Chamber was committed to the same prison, for hearing Mr. Greenwood read the Scripture, where he died. Roger Jackson and George Bright were sent close prisoners to Newgate, where they both died. Maynard, Roe and Barrow, three aged widows, were committed to Newgate by the bishop of London, for hearing Mr. Greenwood read the Scripture, where two of them died. Quintin Smyth was committed to Newgate, confined in a dungeon, loaded with irons, and his Bible taken from him. John Purdye was sent to Bridewell by the archbishop of Canterbury, where he was confined in a place called *Little Ease*, and beaten with cudgels, for refusing to attend the service of the parish church. Many others endured similar barbarous usage ; but these instances are recorded as specimens of the oppressions and cruelties of those in power.*

After this long detail of facts attested by unexceptionable authorities, it may not be improperly asked, whether anti-christian intolerance and shocking persecution were not leading characters in the ecclesiastical supremacy ? We might also inquire whether queen Elizabeth had any more right to destroy her subjects, for their religious opinions, than her bloody sister Mary had to do the same, on similar pretence ? We may likewise ask, why are the ecclesiastical proceedings and government of the one so often cursed as cruel and bloody persecutions ; and those of the other so often applauded as the glory of England, and of the established church ? If Mary and

* Baker's MSS. vol. xiv. p. 311. xv. 59—117.

Elizabeth punished scrupulous dissenters from their respective churches, with imprisonment and death, they were both guilty of the same crime. The blood of the martyred victims sacrificed to the supremacy of Elizabeth, equally stained her hands, and was equally atrocious in the sight of God, as that of the other daughter of Henry. The assumed right of dictating to conscience, and of controlling men in religion, is a principle equally applicable to both sisters, and the law by which the true character of their respective proceedings is to be ascertained.

The principle assumed by modern abettors of persecution is, that the conduct of princes and prelates of former times, is not to be held amenable to the same rule of judgment as in modern times. This softening principle, it ought to be recollected, is rarely assumed except to extenuate the guilt of early protestants, whose acts are known to be indefensible. Do we ever find this extenuation applied in favour of the Romish church, and her antichristian institutions? When are the cruelties of Gardiner, Bonner and Mary, softened down by considerations drawn from the age and circumstances in which they inflicted their barbarities on protestants? But if the same rule of judgment will not apply to queen Elizabeth and her bishops, as if their proceedings had happened in more modern times, why is not some apology admitted on behalf of other persecutors, even within the precincts of the church of Rome? Is the rule of human conduct, as given us by our Creator, and as forming the standard of our obligation to him, variable with the times and circumstances of the world? Whatever pleas men may be disposed to make, there is one equal and unbending law by which all human conduct must be judged; and it is impossible to avoid feeling suspicion, that some unworthy influence is suffered to pervert men's judgments, when they make such weak distinctions, and apply such softening apologies, for any class of men, at any time, or in any country, who have punished and tormented their fellow-creatures merely for differences in religion.

The point of inquiry, in the important case now before us, is not which of the two sisters destroyed, on the score of religion, the greater *number* of human beings, nor which was guilty of the largest share of iniquity and blood; but whether the

one actually possessed a right which the other did not possess, to take away the lives of her subjects, merely because their religious opinions were unconformable to those of the state? To affirm that one was a protestant, and sought the destruction of error; and that the other was a papist and sought the destruction of truth, leaves the great question unanswered. Elizabeth being a learned and enlightened protestant, ought to have known better than to oppress men's understandings and consciences with fire and fagot; on this account, her proceedings were attended with additional atrocity: but Mary being a blind and bigoted catholic, knew no better than to promote her religion by murdering her subjects; and, for this reason, there was some extenuation of guilt. While it was the very genius of Mary's religion to commit such barbarities, and that of Elizabeth's with all possible carefulness to avoid them, the proceedings of both were violent hostilities to protestantism and humanity, to the law of nature and the word of God.

Nor will it be any satisfactory apology, in this case, to say that Elizabeth's power was established by the laws of the land. Mary's power was as much established by the laws of the land as that of Elizabeth; but will that prove all her atrocities to have been just and good? Why then should the argument be applied in the one case, and rejected in the other? Statute laws will not establish the right of illegitimate power, and legally authorize acts of flagrant cruelty and injustice, even in the supreme governor of the church. But she had taken possession of the keys, and was determined that no man should exist in her church, or under her government, who would not bow to her ecclesiastical pleasure! It was no wonder she assumed so extravagant a power, since she made this open declaration to the house of commons:—"It hath been confirmed and enacted, as *the truth required*, that the full power, authority, jurisdiction, and supremacy in ecclesiastical causes, which *heretofore the popes usurped* and took to themselves, should be united and annexed to the *imperial crown* of this realm!!!"*

The queen, on this occasion, delivered her sentiments without equivocation or reserve. It will never be doubted among protestants, whether the ecclesiastical supremacy had been

* Strype's Whitgift, p. 260.

usurped by the popes ; yet it will most certainly be questioned whether the same kind of supremacy *actually* belonged to queen Elizabeth : unless, in conformity to her majesty's lofty assumption, we are to have protestant popes, female popes, and even popes in England, as well as at Rome.

A learned churchman having described some of the principal acts of Elizabeth's potent supremacy, adds—If these are not flagrant instances of weakness and misrule, which were not owing to sudden gusts of passion, but to her own tyrannical disposition, then all arbitrary power may be defended as just and necessary. The ruling passion of this princess was to preserve her crown, and her prerogative ; and every measure that she devised, or approved when projected by her ministers, was subservient to these two purposes. To this we are to place her frequent compulsive imperious treatment of the house of commons, in open violation of the privileges of parliament, and the rights and liberties of the subject. To the same concern for her prerogative, we are to place all the measures which she directed against those who scrupled conformity to the ecclesiastical establishment ; and to her alone it was owing at *first*, and not to her bishops, that no concession or indulgence was granted to tender consciences. She understood her prerogative, which was as dear to her as her crown and life, but she understood *nothing of the rights of conscience* ; and, like her oppressive father, she would not allow any religious opinions to be acknowledged besides her own.* Such were the tender mercies of the Virgin Queen !

Notwithstanding the numerous occurrences which have been related, and many others, of a similar description which might have been added, her majesty was graciously pleased to make the following open declaration to her last parliament :—" I was never so much enticed with the glorious name of a king, or royal authority of a queen, as delighted that God hath made me the instrument to maintain his *truth* and *glory*, and to defend this kingdom from *peril*, *dishonour*, *tyranny*, and *oppression* !"† Her majesty is said to have been an exact observer of two state maxims : " Never to force men's consciences ;" and " never to suffer faction to go unpunished !"‡

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 474.

† D'Ewes, p. 660.

‡ Echard, p. 415.

It ought not to be forgotten, that while queen Elizabeth persecuted protestants at home, she ably and generously protected them abroad. In France, the duke of Guise sought the utter extirpation of the protestant religion, and the protestant ministers were commanded to depart the kingdom; when the queen of England took them under her royal protection, generously furnished them with money and arms in defence of their liberties against their natural prince, and with great humanity received under the wing of her protection those who fled to England. In the Netherlands, the duke of Alva, breathing slaughter and blood, forced vast numbers of protestant subjects to relinquish their homes, and seek a sanctuary in England. They were kindly received in this country, and, by her majesty's permission, were allowed to settle at Norwich, Colchester, and other places, to the unspeakable advantage of our linen and woollen manufactures. These distressed foreigners not only found a secure retreat from the storm of persecution, but obtained a *toleration* or indulgence of their *presbyterian discipline* and *worship* in their respective congregations.*

The foregoing account of the royal power of Elizabeth, cannot fail to afford great interest to every discerning protestant, and every true friend to religious freedom. While we behold those significant features in her majesty's character, which time will not be able to obliterate, we have a clear view of the conspicuous station in which she was placed, and the extraordinary measures which she adopted, as well in the permanent security, as in the original reformation of the church. We are constrained, however, to pause here, and make inquiry—By whom was the queen endowed with this transcendent power? The only just reply to this question is, that the two houses of parliament endowed her majesty with this royal power, when they passed the famous act of supremacy.

Another inquiry of unquestionable importance, requires to be answered—By whom were queen Elizabeth's two houses of parliament invested with wonderful power and authority, so as to be sufficiently qualified to implant it in the sovereign

* Echard, p. 338.—Strype, vol. ii. p. 284.

will and pleasure of a single person? If the fond admirers of the lenity and mildness of Elizabeth's proceedings, do not answer this momentous question, on the most substantial and satisfactory grounds, the whole fabric must moulder to pieces, and her famous hierarchy must sink beneath its own weight. But if the advocates of this lofty tower, whose top, like that of Babel, aspired towards heaven, will affirm, that this boundless power and authority naturally and necessarily existed in the breast of the queen, by virtue of her exalted royal character; why was she formally invested with it by act of parliament? Or, if they affirm that it naturally and necessarily existed in her two loyal houses, by virtue of their high official situations; or, if they affirm that the two houses received this power and authority by divine inspiration and directly from God, and were, on either of these grounds, sufficiently authorized to plant it in the sovereign and arbitrary breast of a single person; they would no doubt confer a single benefit upon society and the world at large, by proving, from clear and satisfactory process, the truth of their allegations.

Should it, on the contrary, be absolutely impossible to prove the one or the other of these positions; but especially if they both stand diametrically opposed to truth, it will unavoidably follow, that the power and authority claimed and exercised by the two houses, when they undertook to invest the royal lady with the supreme government "in all spiritual and ecclesiastical matters," was an unhallowed claim—a mere assumption. They claimed and exercised that which did not belong to them, or to any creatures in heaven or on earth; and they professedly conferred that upon the royal female, which in reality they had no *right*, no *authority*, no *ability* to bestow on any mortal. It is absolutely impossible to invest any mere creature with the supreme direction and government of religion, until, like God, he be invested with the power and authority of searching, and trying, and governing the hearts of men.

In the acceptance and exercise of this transcendent power, queen Elizabeth only trod in the steps of her royal father. Henry VIII. was as much the pope of England, as the sovereign pontiff was of Rome; and how far his daughter Elizabeth imitated his example, if undoubted facts contain proof,

the reader will easily judge. But why should either Henry or Elizabeth assume such high authority in the church of God? Why should they oppress and persecute multitudes of their most peaceable and loyal subjects, merely because they could not, on points of religion, believe what they believed, and, with a good conscience, practise what they enjoined, in things relating to the worship of God, and the salvation of their souls? Why should the wanton cruelties of Henry be universally detested among protestants, and those of Elizabeth be almost universally applauded? Or, why should the barbarities of queen Mary be denominated bloody transactions, and those of her royal sister laudable and salutary proceedings, for the advancement of the reformation, and the honour of the church of England?

Had Elizabeth imbibed the same principles, prosecuted the same plans, and been influenced by the same spirit, as her brother Edward, the faithful historian would have had a task much less painful to perform, and the consequences have been inconceivably more happy to herself and her people—to her government and the church. She would have purified the church of secularity, corruption, and intolerance, and have united all the friends of the reformation, who were the great support of her throne. It was in her power, had she been so disposed, to have perfected the reformation, restored the Christian church to a state of apostolic simplicity, and secured to all her worthy subjects, their just and perfect religious freedom. Had she directed her attention to these objects, she would have prevented those dissensions among her protestant subjects which continued during the whole of her reign, and which she bequeathed as a legacy to her successors: she would have secured the warmest affection to her person, the most permanent harmony among her people, and the greatest honour, glory, and happiness to the church of God.

SECTION III.

*Ecclesiastical Subscription and other Episcopal Proceedings
subversive of liberal Principles.*

THE principal legislative acts on which the reformation and the established church were originally founded, with their

influence on the rights and liberties of the people, have been particularly noticed. By an important clause in the act of supremacy, her majesty was professedly invested with ability to communicate vast power and authority to whom she pleased; and so, by these under governors, to fulfil her royal will and pleasure as the supreme governor of the church. This gave birth to numerous ecclesiastical courts and commissions, which were employed as the great engines, under her majesty, of executing the government of the political establishment. The queen having invested the bishops and others with power and authority, to impose oaths, subscriptions, and other bonds of discipline, they did not fail to observe her royal instructions, and obey her sovereign will.

The first attempt of this kind, was that of archbishop Parker, in the year 1560; when, in the visitation of his province, he drew up *two* forms. One of them was an oath to be required of the clergy and the patrons of livings, the tenor of which was—"You shall swear that you will be faithful and obedient to the queen's majesty, her heirs and successors, to the uttermost of your power, understanding, and learning. You shall maintain and set forth all statutes and laws, and the religion received by her grace, her heirs or successors, and the Injunctions at this present time exhibited by her grace, her officers and commissioners. And you shall make true presentment of all such things as are to be presented in this visitation."

The other was a form of subscription required of all who enjoyed ecclesiastical preferment; which consisted of the following declaration of the queen's supremacy, owning the Book of Common-prayer, and her majesty's injunctions:—"We acknowledge and confess the restoring again of the ancient jurisdiction over the state ecclesiastical and spiritual of this realm of England, to the *Crown* of this realm: The abolishing of all foreign power repugnant to the same, according to an act thereof made in the late parliament at Westminster: The administration of the sacraments, the use and order of divine service, in manner and form as it is set forth in the book commonly called, 'The Book of Common-prayer,' established by the same: and the orders and rules contained in the Injunctions given by the queen's majesty, and exhibited unto us in this present visitation, to be *according to the true word of God*,

and agreeable to the doctrine and use of the *primitive* and *apostolic* church. In witness of the premises to *be true* we have unfeignedly hereunto subscribed our names.”*

In order that the reader may perceive how far the clergy were prepared to bear unfeigned testimony, under their hands, that the whole of the premises was *true*; he must recollect, that only two years had expired since nearly all the clergy and people of England had been forcibly dislodged from the vassallage of Rome, and plucked by the royal will even from the very dregs of popery. But how the ecclesiastical rulers could see, that the whole of what was contained in the premises was according to the *word of God*, and agreeable to the *doctrine* and *use* of the *apostolic* church, posterity will no doubt be at a loss to conceive. In which page of the New Testament of Jesus Christ do we find an exhibition of the ecclesiastical and spiritual jurisdiction as belonging to the crowns of princes? Where do we find the manner and form of administering the sacraments, and of the public service contained in the Book of Common-prayer, announced in the words of divine inspiration? In what part of the sacred volume shall we find any thing similar to the orders and rules commanded to be observed in her majesty’s injunctions?

It is an indubitable fact, attested by all respectable historical records, that the first propagators of Christianity, and the primitive churches of Jesus Christ, were under the civil government of *Pagan* princes, until the days of Constantine the Great, which was *three hundred* years after the commencement of the Christian era: and, throughout this long period, did the ecclesiastical and spiritual jurisdiction belong to the crowns of the Roman emperors? Did they prescribe to all Christians the manner and form of administering the sacraments, and of worshipping God? Did they give injunctions for the good order and discipline of the churches of Christ? No man who has examined the subject will make any such pretensions. On the contrary, no historical fact can rest on stronger evidence, than that, during the above period, nearly all the princes of this world conspired against the church of God, and used their most vigorous efforts to destroy all their Christian subjects,

* Strype’s Parker, p. 77.

with every trace of Christianity in their dominions. How then could the restoring of ecclesiastical and spiritual jurisdiction to the crown, or the legislative Prayer-book and administration of the sacraments, or the orders and rules contained in the queen's injunctions, be all, and in every point, "according to the word of God?" How was it possible for all these particulars to be exactly "agreeable to the doctrine," and even the "*use of the primitive and apostolic church?*" Such was the glaring imposition and falsehood of this ecclesiastical subscription; which could be intended only to promote a political religion, and to uphold a legislative institution.

If all the parts of this subscription had been plain and obvious truth, the imposition of it was a dangerous assumption, a flagrant usurpation of the regal office and power of Jesus Christ, and an open infringement on the rights and liberties of Christians. Their rational faculties were given them by their Creator to use and improve, to the widest possible extent, on all sacred and divine subjects, and not to be placed in slavish subjection to the coercive impositions of their fellow-creatures. Every man is indispensably bound by his Creator and his Judge to think and believe for himself, in all things pertaining to faith and the worship of God, and no other person can possibly do it for him; so that all impositions of subscription are not only unwarrantable, but in direct opposition to that which God requires at our hands. No man has ever produced sufficient credentials for imposing his religious opinions upon me, any more than I have for imposing mine upon him. All men stand, as to this point, on exactly the same ground.

In the year 1562, sat the famous convocation, to review the doctrine and discipline of the church, when the forty-two articles of king Edward were reduced to "Thirty-nine," without making any material alteration in doctrine. These articles were subscribed by all the members of the convocation, and required to be subscribed by all the clergy in the kingdom. The archbishop declared, at the opening of the convocation, that they had now an opportunity of perfecting the reformation of the church; and that the queen, and many of the nobility, were desirous that it should be accomplished. With these flattering prospects, therefore, as soon as the doctrinal articles were concluded, bishop Sandys offered a paper of ad-

vice concerning rites and ceremonies, recommending the abolition of private baptism by women, and crossing the infant on the forehead, which, he said, was *needless* and *very superstitious*. He also recommended, that a committee might be appointed to reform the ecclesiastical laws; and that these regulations might be confirmed by parliament.

On this memorable occasion, another paper was likewise presented, signed by thirty-three of the most respectable members, desiring a further reformation of the church; but this not being approved, a third was introduced, containing the following regulations: That all holy-days, except Sundays, and the feasts relating to Christ, be abrogated. That in reading the Common-prayer, the minister should turn his face to the people, that they may hear and be edified. That the cross in baptism may be omitted as tending to superstition. That the posture of kneeling at the sacrament may be left to the discretion of every ordinary. That it be sufficient for the minister in saying divine service, and ministering the sacraments, to wear a surplice, and that ministers do this only in a comely garment. And that the use of organs be omitted. These propositions excited warm debates; and, upon a division, it appeared, that forty-three approved of them, and thirty-five were against them; but when the proxies were counted, the scales were turned; and it was determined by a majority of *only one* vote, that there should be no alteration of rites and ceremonies. Several other papers and petitions were presented, with a view to obtain a reformation of the discipline and government of the church; but, notwithstanding the flattering prospects held out by the archbishop, nothing was passed into law; and this was the end and unfinished state of the English reformation.*

The learned Reformers experienced a painful disappointment in the convocation, but found no method of redressing their grievances. They were exceedingly perplexed and dissatisfied with the corruptions retained in the church; yet there was no remedy within their power, only they mourned before the Lord in secret. The bishops conceiving themselves empowered by the ecclesiastical canons, began to exercise their

* Strype, vol. i. p. 325—357.—Warner, vol. ii. p. 430.

authority by requiring the clergy of their respective dioceses to subscribe to the liturgy, ceremonies, and discipline of the church ; which was followed by consequences the most painful to every pious mind.*

The queen having erected the court of high commission, archbishop Parker and his colleagues determined to reduce the church to one uniform order, and therefore cited many of the clergy before them, admonishing some, and threatening others. The most celebrated divines at Oxford and other places, who had taken an active part in the reformation, were convened before them, some of whom they sequestered, and others they deprived. This was a great affliction to persons of the same faith and religion with their countrymen, who had been sufferers and exiles with them during the persecution of queen Mary. Among these we may mention the names of Humphrey, Sampson, Whittingham, Becon, Turner, and Coverdale, all famous in their day and generation.

The archbishop and his brethren in commission, not content with the exercise of their own authority to its fullest extent, sought the favourable assistance of the council, and pressed with greater rigour an exact uniformity in external ceremonies. They convened the London clergy before them at Lambeth ; and upon their appearance in open court, one Mr. Cole, a clergyman, being placed by the side of the commissioners in priestly apparel, they were addressed in these words :—" My masters, and ye ministers of London, the council's pleasure is, that ye strictly keep the unity of apparel, like this man who stands here canonically habited, with a square cap, a scholar's gown, priest-like, a tippet, and, in the church, a linen surplice : and inviolably observe the rubric of the Book of Common-prayer, the queen's majesty's injunctions, and the book of convocation. Ye that will subscribe, write *Volo* ; those that will not subscribe, write *Nolo*. Be brief : make no words." When some of the ministers offered to speak, they were treated with great rudeness, and immediately interrupted with this command : "*Peace, peace ; apparitor, call over the churches : ye masters, answer presently under the penalty of contempt.*"†

* Fuller, b. ix. p. 76.

† Strype, vol. i. p. 464.—Strype's Grindal p. 98.

At the close of this disgraceful proceeding, sixty-one promised conformity, but thirty-seven absolutely refused, who, as the archbishop acknowledged, were the best among them. These being immediately suspended from their ministry, and their livings sequestered, were threatened with deprivation, if they did not conform within three months. It was expected that, under all this intolerance, they would have been clamorous; yet they behaved throughout with great modesty and quietness.*

On this, or a similar occasion, the celebrated John Fox was summoned, with the rest of the London ministers, to appear at Lambeth; when they were examined upon this question: "Will you promise conformity to the apparel by law established, and testify the same by the subscription of your hands?" To prepare the way for the rest, the venerable Martyrologist was called first, that the reputation of his learning and piety, might give the greater countenance to their proceedings. When the commissioners required him to subscribe, he declined, and, taking his Greek Testament out of his pocket, said, "To this I will subscribe." When they required him to subscribe to the canons, he refused, saying—"I have nothing in the church but a prebend in Salisbury, and much good may it do you, if you take it from me."† The judges at this tribunal had not sufficient courage to deprive so celebrated a divine, who held up the ashes of Smithfield before their eyes.

The commissioners, at the same time, framed an oath of a very extraordinary nature, by which they commanded those clergymen who had cure of souls, to swear obedience to all the queen's injunctions; to all letters from the lords of the privy-council; to the injunctions of their metropolitans; to the mandates of their bishops, archdeacons, chancellors, and their officers; and to be patiently subject to the control of their superiors. By such oaths, archbishop Parker outran the rest of his brethren, and drove many conscientious Christians from the church.‡

The jealous primate had his eyes fixed on the two universities; and, looking upon Cambridge as the very nursery of

* Strype's Parker, p. 215. † Fuller, b. ix. p. 76. ‡ Warner, vol. ii. p. 435.

puritanism, he warmly recommended the chancellor to crush the evil in the bud, by there enforcing an exact uniformity as by law established. The university being alarmed, petitioned their chancellor for milder measures, as we have before stated. Those who scrupled conformity, at the same time supplicated the chancellor, that their consciences might not be forced to the observance of the ceremonies; and that the most painful yoke of slavery, and exquisite torment, might not be again imposed upon them. They reminded him, that they had not cast away the superstitious ceremonies out of malice, vain-glory, or any affection for popularity, out of contempt of the laws, or any desire of innovation, but out of love to the truth. They could call the Searcher of Hearts to witness, that herein they sought to enjoy peace of conscience, and the true worship of God.*

The oppressed puritans, being treated by their superiors as if their allegiance had been questionable, were required to make this protestation:—"I do promise and confess before God, that I firmly believe in my conscience that queen Elizabeth, my sovereign lady now reigning in England, is and ought to be lawful queen, and so to be obeyed; notwithstanding any act or sentence, that any church, synod, consistory, or ecclesiastical assembly hath done or given, or can do or give: and that if any say or judge the contrary, in what respect soever he saith it, he erreth and teacheth error and falsehood."†

This protestation betrays the spirit of the times. There was a large share of impertinence in this proceeding. For the prelates knew very well, that the puritans only scrupled those things against which their very souls revolted, and that in all other things they obeyed the queen out of duty and affection, even while the pressures under which they groaned were upon them. Why then was their allegiance suspected? And, as was actually the case, why were they placed on the same ground, and considered in the same light, as bigoted and rebellious papists? Similar to this, alas! has been the unhappy stigma cast upon the best of men in every age!

The proceedings of the ecclesiastical commissioners were unjustifiable on every principle of reason, humanity and

* Strype's Parker, p. 196.

† Ibid. p. 324.

Scripture ; seeing they attempted to force men to conformity against their consciences, over which God alone has the supremacy. As it is not within the cognizance of mortals to govern the conscience ; so conscience is accountable to the Almighty and to him alone, in all its operations. The puritans had great advantage over their oppressors. Their principles and practice were as remote as they could be from all temporal power, worldly dignity, and secular emolument ; and they voluntarily exposed themselves to poverty, reproach, and imprisonment, for the sake of truth and a good conscience : while the opposite party enjoyed splendid ecclesiastical promotion, the smiles of the court, and great worldly wealth, but displayed their furious zeal for those things which never belonged to the laws and kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Bishop Sandys, who had been exceedingly zealous for a purer reformation, was now become equally zealous for the suppression of those who sought to promote it. He addressed two leading members of the council, calling aloud for help in this work of piety. He signified that the metropolis would never be quiet, till these scrupulous persons, who were esteemed as gods, were removed far from the city. The people, he said, resorted to them as in times of popery they run on pilgrimage ; but added, “ if these *idols*, who are honoured for saints, and greatly enriched with gifts, were removed from hence, their honour would fall into the dust, and they would be taken for blocks as they are. A sharp letter from her majesty, or your lordships, would be a good means in my opinion to work quietness. Truly, my lords, it is high time to lay to your hands, if you mind the good of God’s church, or the safety of this state !” * This prelate and most of his brethren had suffered persecution and exile in the reign of Mary ; but, being now exalted to high posts of honour and wealth, they forgot their former condition, and persecuted their brethren of the same faith, who scrupled the standard of religion provided by the state.

The oppressive treatment of the conscientious sufferers awakened the sympathy and concern of the two houses of parliament ; therefore, in the year 1571, an act was passed,

* Strype’s Whitgift, Appen. p. 20.

requiring the clergy to subscribe and declare their assent to all the articles of religion, "which *only* concern the confession of the true Christian faith, and the doctrine of the sacraments." It appears from these words of the statute, that those articles which related to discipline were not intended to be terms of admission to orders or benefices; and if the queen and her bishops had governed by this act, as they most certainly ought to have done, this would have been a considerable alleviation to the painful sufferers.* But the queen assumed her admired prerogative, and the bishops were servile in their compliance with it; so that many of the clergy were deprived of their preferments.†

The convocation which now sat, were so far from giving ease to their own body and the rest of the clergy, that they used their utmost efforts to increase their burdens. They had the confidence to make new canons of discipline, going very far beyond the statute; and by these canons the bishops were required, not only to call in all the licenses for preaching, and to grant new ones to those ministers whom they approved; but also to insist upon *another* kind of subscription than that prescribed by law, even to those articles which related to the rites, order, and policy of the church, as well as to her doctrines. The canons failed of obtaining the royal assent; but most of the bishops, relying on her majesty's approbation, executed them in their respective dioceses with great punctuality; suspending and depriving many eminent divines, who scrupled not the subscription required by the statutes of the realm.‡

This convocation gave new occasion for scrupulous persons to complain; many of whom ventured to claim the liberty allowed them by law, and refused the canonical subscription, as an oppressive usurpation over their consciences. Being turned out of their livings, they preached in other churches, or in private houses, without license, as they found an opportunity. But the queen hearing of this deviation from established order, immediately commanded the archbishop and his brethren in commission not to suffer any of her subjects, "to read, pray, or preach, or minister any sacraments, in churches,

* Sparrow, p. 118.

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 439.

‡ Ibid. p. 440.

chapels, or private places, without a license from the queen, the archbishop, or bishop of the diocese."

The archbishop stimulated by his sovereign mistress, soon became "very busy," and declared, "that howsoever the world might judge, he would serve God, his princess, and her laws in conscience, and it was high time to set about it."* His colleagues were of the same mind. They closely adhered to the canonical discipline; enforced conformity with great rigour; and, according to the computation of a respectable historian, at least one hundred ministers were deprived this year for scrupling subscription.† This was not all. The commissioners, not content with exceeding the bounds thus fixed them by law, exceeded the punishment to be inflicted, by detaining many of them in prison several months beyond the term limited by statute, to the ruin of their health, and the impoverishment of their families. It is added, that "the cruelties exercised by the high commissioners upon worthy divines of the same faith, on account of subscriptions not required by statute, fell little short of those which Bonner showed the Reformers in the days of Mary."‡

The forms of subscription were intended to secure one perfect uniformity, yet there was an actual variation in different dioceses; but that which most commonly prevailed was in these words:—"I acknowledge the book of articles agreed upon by the clergy in the synod of 1563, and confirmed by the queen's majesty, to be sound and according to the word of God.—That the queen's majesty is the chief governor, next under Christ, of this church of England, as well in *ecclesiastical* as civil causes.—That in the Book of Common-prayer, there is nothing evil or repugnant to the word of God, but that it may well be used in this our Christian church of England.—And that as the public preaching of the word in this church of England is sound and sincere; so the public order in the ministration of the sacraments is consonant to the word of God."§

Since the liberty of preaching and printing was denied, many persons, ready to sink under their burdens, pressed the

* Strype's Parker, p. 325.

† Strype, vol. ii. p. 167.

‡ Warner, vol. ii. p. 442.

§ Parte of a Register, p. 81.

contrary party to a public disputation. This had been allowed in the reigns of Edward and Mary, as well as in the beginning of this reign; and bishop Sandys was inclined to afford this liberty to the oppressed puritans. He sent a list of divines whom he thought capable of conducting the controversy on the part of the church, to certain leading members of the council; but the queen would not permit her church and religion to be exposed to the freedom and cavils of a disputation. Instead therefore of a conference, several learned divines were convened before the council and the high commission, when they underwent examinations as before an Inquisition; and, according to their answers, some were suspended, and others sent to Newgate.

The learned prelates were so exceedingly zealous to uphold the church, that they not only went beyond the legislative boundaries, but even exceeded in certain instances the royal will and pleasure. One instance it may not be improper to relate, being one of the last acts of archbishop Parker. His grace, in the metropolitical visitation of the diocese of Winchester, particularly the Isle of Wight, exercised those severities which greatly injured his reputation. This island having been chiefly a place of resort for foreign protestants, and seafaring men of other countries and other religious opinions, it was judged expedient, especially for the encouragement of commerce, not to be so strict about habits and ceremonies, as in other places. Upon the arrival of the archbishop, without the least demur, his grace expelled all the clergy who refused strict conformity, and shut up their churches. The inhabitants being greatly concerned about this rigour, and apprehensive of its fatal consequences to the island, sent their complaints to the court. The bishop of Winchester was not silent, but accused his grace of having examined many of his clergy with unmerciful inquisition. On the reception of these charges, the queen countermanded the archbishop's proceedings; appointed every thing to return into the former channel; and when the archbishop came to court, her majesty not only received him very coldly, but declared her displeasure against his late visitation.*

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 443, 444.

Camden has condescended to mention the persecuted puritans ; but it is to charge them with the sin of *petulance*, and the love of *novelty* : words that have no more relation to the rights of conscience, than archbishops, archdeacons, chancellors, and officials, have to apostolic Christianity. To oppose and persecute them for conscience's sake, was unquestionably the worst kind of *petulance*. Such, indeed, was their love of *novelty*, that they traced their religion to the apostolic age, and wished to have it confined to apostolic truth ; whereas the conformity so severely enjoined was to a church not *twenty* years old, separated from one of a *thousand* years standing. Who then were the true novelists ?

It is sufficient to make any Christian's heart bleed, and his eyes shed floods of tears, to behold a true picture of the sufferings now inflicted upon pious ministers. They were daily cited into the spiritual courts, when their examinations were protracted ; their accusations unreasonable ; and they were generally suspended, deprived, or cast into prison. The pursuivants of the court were paid by the mile ; the fees were exorbitant, which the prisoner must pay before he was discharged ; the method of proceeding was slow and vexatious. The commissioners seldom called witnesses to prove the charges, but usually tendered the defendant the oath *ex officio*, to answer the interrogatories of the court, and convicted him on the ground of his own confession. If the prisoner disowned their proceedings, he was almost ruined by charges, and bound in recognizances to appear whenever the court pleased. The consciences of these ministers being known to be scrupulous, the spiritual court-men, being strangers to such consciences, had great advantage over them, and failed not to use them with great rigour. They knew that these scrupulous good men would not deny any thing with which they were charged, if it were true ; so that whether they swore or refused the oath, their enemies got what they wanted by their inquisition, and then proceeded to convict and punish them. Numerous instances, proving the truth of these representations, might be easily selected. It was no wonder, therefore, that archbishop Parker exclaimed in these words :—" I understand throughout the realm how the matter is taken : the pu-

ritans are justifieded, and we are judged to be extreme persecutors.”*

Queen Elizabeth was now at peace with all the world, except her faithful subjects, the puritans, with whom she would have no peace without caps, copes, surplices, and certain old forms and ceremonies in use before the reformation. Her conduct would have been justifiable, and consistent with Christianity, if she had used all charitable persuasion to bring her subjects to her religion ; but, as she suffered and even encouraged her bishops to harass and oppress them, for so trivial an object—an object that was absolutely unattainable, her conduct was an outrage upon every principle of justice and Christianity, an open violation of humanity and sound policy. The apostles and first teachers of Christianity would have disdained to fight men with such coarse weapons, or to have contended for such ridiculous trifles in the church of God ; and if the injunctions of princes, or the canons of prelates, had been recommended for the government of the churches of Christ, they would no doubt have rejected them as absolutely unnecessary and unworthy of their attention : they would have lost their lives in the conflict, rather than have suffered the laws of Christ to be set aside, and the Christian churches to be governed by the commandments of men.

On the death of archbishop Grindal in 1583, Dr. John Whitgift was preferred to the see of Canterbury. This divine, formerly one of the heads of the university of Cambridge, had distinguished himself *against* the imposition of conformity ; after which he turned about, and became zealous in the expulsion of others from that seat of learning, who conscientiously scrupled that conformity ; then he wrote with great labour and assiduity in defence of it. On his last advancement, the queen charged him, to restore the discipline of the church, and the established uniformity ; which, through the connivance of some prelates, the obstinacy of the puritans, and the power of some noblemen, was run out of square. In obedience, therefore, to her royal command, the new archbishop immediately published his directions to the bishops of his province, to secure this endeared object throughout their dioceses. He

* Strype's Parker, p. 389.

gave them instructions to suppress all reading, preaching, praying, and catechizing in families, where any besides the family resorted ; to admit none to exercise the ministerial function, without ordination according to the church of England ; to allow none to preach or catechize who did not wear the clerical habits, read the whole of the public service, and administer the sacrament four times a-year ; and to prohibit all ministers preaching and exercising their ministerial function, who would not subscribe the three following articles :

“ 1. That the queen hath, and ought to have, the sovereignty and rule over all manner of persons, born within her dominions, of what condition soever they be ; and that none other power or potentate hath, or ought to have, any power, ecclesiastical or civil, within her realms or dominions.—2. That the Book of Common-prayer, and of ordaining bishops, priests and deacons, containeth in it *nothing contrary to the word of God*, but may be lawfully used ; and that he himself will use the same and none other, in public prayer and administration of the sacraments.—3. That he alloweth the book of articles, agreed upon in the convocation holden at London in 1562, and set forth by her majesty’s authority ; and that he believe all the articles therein contained to be agreeable to the word of God.”*

The zealous primate, to show his devotion to the queen and her church, was hurried beyond the bounds prescribed by law ; and his very first archiepiscopal act, in the imposition of articles on the clergy, without the authority of the great seal, or even of the convocation, placed him in great peril, incurring the penalties of a premunire. Regardless of these considerations, his grace imposed subscription to his three articles, with the utmost rigour upon all ministers in his first metropolitanical visitation ; by which above two hundred and thirty clergymen were suspended, most of whom were expelled from the church. These persecuted servants of God, would most cordially have subscribed to the *first* and *third* articles ; but they could not subscribe, that the book of Common-prayer contained *nothing contrary to the word of God* ; because in that book they found many things repulsive to their under-

* Strype’s Whitgift, p. 115.

standings, offensive to their consciences, and at variance with the Scriptures.

These honest sufferers, having the common feelings of human nature, could not help groaning under this treatment as a sore tribulation. They laid open their wounds and complaints to the queen, the archbishop, the lords of the council, and the parliament; but without success. The proceedings of the archbishop and several of his brethren, produced universal consternation; and the inhabitants of the vacant parishes sent their complaints to the treasurer and the council: but, to destroy the effect of these applications, the archbishop informed the council, that the cause of the clergy did not at all belong to them, and that he could not discharge his duty to the queen, unless he might proceed without interruption.

The primate was, however, convinced of one error. He presently found that his metropolitical jurisdiction was insufficient to accomplish his purpose; but, having a remedy near at hand, he applied to the queen for a new commission, which her majesty readily granted. In this royal grant, the queen is said to have exceeded the power with which she was invested by law; and the proceedings of the commissioners were, for the most part, contrary to the act of submission, contrary to the statutes of the realm, and little better than a spiritual inquisition.*

It ought to be recollected, that any parishioner, out of malice against his minister, might inform the commissioners by letter that he was a suspected person, after which a pursuivant, being paid ten-pence a mile, was sent to summon him before the spiritual tribunal, when he was cast into prison till the next court day. Upon his appearance at the bar, he was required to take the oath *ex officio*, to answer all questions which they might be inclined to propose; and, by this iniquitous process, he was forced into an accusation of himself, or his nearest relations and friends. He was not allowed to receive any previous information of the interrogatories, nor to have a copy of his own answers; and if he were not convicted upon his confession, they never cleared him upon his oath. If they could not convict him upon any statute, they had recourse

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 453, 454.

to some old obsolete popish law, to their own canons, or the queen's injunctions; and the prisoner had very seldom any previous knowledge of the points upon which he was to be tried, or how to make his defence.*

The suffering puritans approached their superiors with prayers and supplications, which would have moved any hearts except those of stone. The silenced ministers of Kent presented their humble supplication to the convocation, which they concluded in these words:

"We seek not, the Lord being witness, to deface the state of our church, nor take any pleasure to discover the imperfections of it; whose true honour, happy estate, and holy peace, we wish more than any thing in the world; and desire that these things may be concealed from the common enemy, and never heard of at Rome nor at Rheims; according as it is said: 'Tell it not in Gath; Let it not be heard in Askalon!' But upon such necessities and extremities into which some of us have been brought, and especially which are endured by the poor and desolate churches; wherein we have some time laboured to our power faithfully to serve the Lord in the sincerity of his word, and now are left without any preaching minister among them, which woundeth the soul of our soul, and our most secret spirit: we are constrained modestly to lay open the sores and wounds thereof before your reverend synod, of whom in all duty and reason we are chiefly to hope to receive some comfort and relief: that if there be any Balm in Gilead, and any Physician in all Israel, our infected church, and the daughter of our people may be healed."†

These applications proved ineffectual.‡ The archbishop and his colleagues frustrated every generous attempt to obtain redress, and even plunged the supplicants into greater difficulties than those under which they already laboured. To accomplish this, his grace drew up twenty-four articles for the service of the high commission, which were sufficient to entangle and ruin all the honest men in the kingdom. The lord treasurer Burleigh having read these articles, and beheld the execution they had done upon the clergy, wrote thus to the archbishop:

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 455.

† Defence of Ministers, p. 79, 80.

‡ Strype's Whitgift, p. 176—183.

“ I am sorry to trouble you so often ; but I am more troubled myself, not only with many private petitions of ministers, recommended from persons of credit, as peaceable persons in their ministry, and yet are greatly troubled by your grace and your colleagues in commission ; but I am daily charged by counsellors and public persons with neglect of duty, in not staying these your grace’s proceedings so vehement and so general against ministers and preachers ; that the papists are thereby generally encouraged, ill-disposed subjects animated, and the queen’s safety endangered.—I have seen an instrument of twenty-four articles, of great length and curiosity, formed in a *Romish* style, to examine all manner of ministers, and to be executed *ex officio mero*.—I find them so curiously penned, so full of branches and circumstances, that I think the *Inquisitors of Spain* use not so many questions to comprehend and to trap their prey. I know your canonists can defend every particle ; but, surely, this judicial and canonical sifting of poor ministers is not to edify or reform. In charity, I think they ought not to answer to all these nice points, except they were very notorious offenders in papistry, or heresy. I write with the testimony of a good conscience. I desire the peace of the church. I desire concord and unity in the exercise of religion. But I conclude, according to my simple judgment, this kind of proceeding is too much savouring of the *Romish Inquisition* ; and is a device to *seek* for offenders, rather than to *reform* them. If those poor ministers should in some few points have any scrupulous conceptions meet to be removed, this is not a charitable way to send them to answer to your *common register*, upon so many articles at one instant, without any instruction from your register, whose office is only to receive their answers ; by which the parties are subject to condemnation, before they are taught their error. I have willed them *not* to answer these articles, except their consciences may suffer them.”*

The archbishop wrote a tedious answer to the treasurer’s letter, professedly in vindication of his articles and proceedings ; to which the treasurer returned a short, but smart reply : That after reading his grace’s long answer, he was not satisfied

* Strype’s Whitgift, Appen. p. 63, 64.

upon the point of seeking by examination to have ministers accuse themselves, and then punish them for their own confessions. He said, "I will not call your grace's proceedings rigorous or captious, but I think they are scarcely charitable." He, therefore, left his grace to deal with his friend Mr. Bayne, as he thought most proper; and concluded by adding—"But when by examination it is only meant to sift him with twenty-four articles, I have cause to pity the poor man."*

These worthy efforts of the lord treasurer were followed by those of the lords of the council, who took the case of the distressed ministers into serious consideration, and sent a sharp rebuke to archbishop Whitgift and bishop Aylmer, the substance of which was—That they had received many complaints from various counties, of proceedings against a great number of ecclesiastical persons; some parsons, some vicars, and some curates, but all *preachers*; some of whom they had suspended, and others they had deprived: but that they had taken no notice of these things, hoping their lordships would have stayed their proceedings, especially against such as earnestly instructed the people against the errors of popery. That they had lately received complaints of great numbers of *zealous* and *learned* preachers who were suspended from their cures; that there was no preaching, prayers, or sacraments in the vacant places; that, in some places, the persons appointed to succeed them, had neither good learning, nor good name, but were drunkards and of filthy life; and that, in other places, a great number of persons occupying cures were notoriously unfit, some for lack of learning, and others chargeable with enormous crimes: as, drunkenness, filthiness of life, gaming at cards, haunting of alehouses, &c. against whom they heard of no proceedings. They, therefore, in the discharge of their duty, earnestly recommended their lordships to take these lamentable evils into charitable consideration: that the people of the realm might not be deprived of their pastors, being diligent, learned, and zealous, though they might in their consciences, but not in wilfulness, seem doubtful in some points of mere ceremony. And they concluded by expressing the gladness they should feel on hearing of their lordships adopting some proper remedy against these enormities.†

* Strype's Whitgift, p. 160.

† Ibid. p. 165, 166.

These applications were liberal, founded on the principles of religion and humanity ; and, though unsuccessful, they discovered a disposition to oppose the overwhelming spiritual despotism, and showed how much greater regard they had for genuine religion, than for superstitious ceremonies. The archbishop did not treat all these honourable applicants with total inattention, as appears from the words of one who could not be tempted to misrepresent any fact to the prejudice of his character. This, says he, was the constant custom of Whitgift : if any lord or lady sued for favour to any nonconformist, he would profess how glad he was to serve them, and gratify their desires, assuring them for his part, that all possible kindness should be indulged to them ; but he would remit nothing of his rigour. Thus he never *denied* any great man's desire, and yet never *granted* it ; pleasing them for the present with general promises, but still adhered to his own resolution : whereupon the nobility ceased making any further application to him, knowing them to be ineffectual.*

The high commission, instead of exercising a greater degree of lenity, began about this time to extend its power farther than at any former period, and to inflict heavier penalties on supposed offenders. This roused the friends of liberal principles to write and publish books in defence of the sufferers, exposing the intolerance of those in power ; and some even questioned whether the court was warranted by law, while others taxed the proceedings of the bishops as exceeding their commission. Their proceeding *ex officio*, against all whom they were pleased to suspect, and their requiring such persons to take an oath to answer their impertinent interrogatories, was conceived to be *unjust*, and nothing less than compelling a supposed criminal to discover what his judges did not know, and what was penal against himself.†

The nation was now in danger of universal spiritual slavery. Prompt and active measures were taken, especially by the archbishop, for a total suppression of the remaining freedom of the press. He complained to the queen of the liberty that was taken by many persons of publishing their religious opinions ; upon which he obtained a memorable decree in the star

* Fuller, b. ix. p. 218.

† Ibid. p. 182, 183.

chamber : That there should be no printing presses in any private places, nor in any part of the kingdom besides London and the two universities ; and these to be allowed by the license of the archbishop, or the bishop of London. That all printers should be proposed to the ecclesiastical commissioners, and none be allowed the practice but those whom they approved. That no book should be printed unless it was perused and approved by the archbishop or bishop of London. That if any person willingly printed, sold, or bound any book against the form and meaning of any statute of the realm, or any of the queen's injunctions, or any letters patents, commissions or prohibitions, such persons should suffer three months imprisonment ; and that the wardens of the stationers' company might search for all such books, and seize them to her majesty's use.*

This remarkable decree was required "to be duly and effectually executed." Was there ever an instance like this, when so much vassallage and blindness was attempted to be imposed upon an enlightened nation ? The subjects of the renowned Elizabeth were thus prohibited from making known through the medium of the press, any religious opinion, any existing corruption in religion, or any grievous burden under which the nation groaned, without the regular and formal approbation of their right reverend fathers. The nation was now in a fair way to retrace its former barbarism and slavery ; and we may defy the annals of popery itself, to produce a more flagrant encroachment on the rights of Christians, or a more detestable attempt to enslave a nation to the caprice and tyranny of the prelates. These usurpations might pass before human nature began to behold and claim its native rights ; but such iniquitous impositions, when only found on the page of history, will awaken the warmest abhorrence in every enlightened mind.

The ecclesiastical governors did not confine their oppressive jurisdiction to booksellers, bookbinders, and printing presses, to the total suppression of every sentiment that was uncongenial with their own views or interests ; but which is most remarkable, they followed authors into their private studies, and imperiously commanded them to lay down their pens. It will

* Strype's Whitgift, p. 223.

be proper here to gratify the reader with one remarkable instance, affording an instructive lesson to posterity.

The famous Rhemish translation of the New Testament, with numerous annotations, was published about this time, and, being sent to England, was industriously dispersed through the country. It was considered by all true protestants as a book of very dangerous tendency; and, being designed to promote the errors, superstitions, and iniquities of popery, it was the opinion of the learned, that both the translation and the notes ought to be answered by the ablest pen that could be procured; and no man in the kingdom was thought so well qualified for the undertaking as the learned and laborious Cartwright. He did not rush hastily upon this great work, which required vast labour and erudition. His sufficiency was universally acknowledged, and his zeal for the true protestant reformation could never be doubted; yet his great modesty and humility would not suffer him to enter upon it, until he was constrained by the numerous and urgent entreaties of others. Several persons of great authority and influence at court pressed him to engage in so laborious and honourable a service: there was nothing wanting to draw his attention and encourage him in this labour of love. The two famous courtiers, the earl of Leicester and Sir Francis Walsingham, made particular application to him, and earnestly entreated him to engage in this important service of the church of God.* The latter of these great statesmen, who in this affair, as in most others, was accounted the very mouth and hand of the queen, sent Mr. Cartwright one hundred pounds towards the expense, with assurance of such further assistance as might be found necessary.†

Mr. Cartwright's celebrity as a scholar and a divine being universally acknowledged, he received affectionate and pressing invitations to encounter the famous popish champion, not only from the reverend and learned ministers of Suffolk and of the city of London, but also from the most celebrated scholars and divines in the university of Cambridge. Having received all these honourable solicitations, he was induced at length to enter upon the laudable and arduous undertaking; and hav-

* Strype's Whitgift, p. 253.

† Clark's Lives annexed to Martyr. p. 19.

ing laboured with all diligence, night and day, for the space of three or four years, and having proceeded to the book of Revelation, archbishop Whitgift, to the great wonder and regret of all learned protestants, and the amazement of posterity, authoritatively forbade him proceeding any further in the work !*

It is impossible to learn how this tyrannical measure belonged to Whitgift's archiepiscopal cognizance and authority, or how it pertained to any part of his ecclesiastical jurisdiction. What right, or even *pretension* of right, could he have to trouble himself about that which Mr. Cartwright was writing against the papists in his own private study ? Who can help wondering at the haughty and troublesome humour of this tyrannical prelate ? Mr. Cartwright knew by painful experience, that the authority and intolerance of Lambeth were much more formidable than all the learning and arguments of the Rhemists ; therefore he meekly obeyed the prohibition, and laid aside the undertaking. But surely the annals of popery will never furnish a similar instance of despotic infamy and wickedness, and of open outrage on the indubitable right of every man using his own pen in defence of the protestant religion, and for the benefit of his fellow-creatures. This was usurping a kind of jurisdiction not inferior to that of the Roman pontiff ; so that archbishop Whitgift, who claimed and exercised it, could not be surprised when he was sometimes styled, " The Pope of Lambeth."

SECTION IV.

Occurrences more favourable to the just Claims of Christians.

THE pious reader has with grief beheld the melancholy events related in the foregoing pages. When bigoted catholics persecute and destroy protestants, it is only what may be expected as the natural tendency of their principles : but when protestants pour vengeance upon their fellow-protestants, merely because they cannot measure their faith and practice by the standard which they have been pleased to set up, or because

* Strype's Whitgift, p. 253, 254.—Fuller, b. ix. p. 171.

they wish to believe and worship God according to their own views of divine revelation, it cannot fail to stamp the worst kind of infamy on the protestant profession, and awaken the opposite feelings of pity and abhorrence in every liberal mind. Had we been unacquainted with the awful depravity of human nature, and had not the facts rested upon the most respectable authorities, we could not have believed the melancholy tale.

In tracing the groans of liberty, and the triumphs of intolerance, during the various stages of the protestant reformation, the faithful historian finds himself opposed by common fame, prevailing ignorance, and inveterate prejudice. Placed in this situation, he is compelled to renounce the old trodden path, and to expose, as in the light of day, the antichristian usurpations and abominations—with pleasing anticipations that truth will eventually triumph over error, and liberal sentiments in the end gain a glorious conquest over persecution and intolerance. With these delightful anticipations, though mingled with the deepest sorrow, we have rehearsed this tale of woe: but, with greater pleasure, we now proceed to relate occurrences of a more gratifying nature—occurrences as honourable to human nature, as they were favourable to the just rights of mankind, the prosperity of religion, and the welfare of society.

Throughout the arduous conflict of this long reign, God raised up many learned and able advocates of truth and moderation; who, notwithstanding the intolerance of those in power, pleaded with invincible courage for a purer reformation, and greater freedom to the church of God. Their views of religious liberty were far from being matured; yet, even Hume, whose prejudices were strong against them, was constrained to acknowledge, when speaking of the oppressions of Elizabeth, “that the precious spark of liberty had been kindled, and was preserved by the Puritans *alone*; and to this sect,” he adds, “whose principles appeared so frivolous, and habits so ridiculous, the ENGLISH OWE THE WHOLE FREEDOM OF THEIR CONSTITUTION.”* This is certainly no common eulogium.

* Hume's Hist. vol. v. p. 134.

The generous and dignified sentiments of the first Reformers, at home and abroad, have been already related. Dr. Lawrence Humphrey, an exile in the reign of queen Mary, and one of the most celebrated divines under queen Elizabeth, wrote on this occasion a most affectionate letter to the bishops, in which he boldly expostulates with them upon their un catholic proceedings, and pleads hard for a better reformation of the Christian church, addressing them as follows :

“ The Gospel requires Christ to be openly preached, professed, and glorified ; but, alas ! a man qualified with inward gifts, for want of outward shows in matters of ceremony, is punished ; and a man only outwardly conformable, and inwardly unfurnished, is exalted. The painful preacher, for his labour, is beaten ; the unpreaching prelate offending, goes free. The learned man without his cap, is afflicted ; the man with his cap, yet unlearned, is not touched. Is not this a direct breach of God’s laws ? Is not this the way of the pharisees ? Is not this to wash the outside of the cup, and leave the inside uncleansed ? Is not this to prefer mint and anise, to faith, and judgment, and mercy ? Is not this preferring man’s traditions, before the ordinance of God ? Is not this an evident disorder in the school of Christ ? And hath not this preposterous order a woe connected with it ?

“ To wear a surplice, a cope, or a cornered cap, is, as you take it, an accidental thing, a device only of man ; and, as we say, a doubt or question in divinity. As those substantial points are in all places of this realm nearly neglected, the offenders are either not at all or but little rebuked, and yet the transgressors have no colour of conscience ; so it is a sin and shame to proceed against us first, especially as we have a reasonable defence of our doings. Charity, my lords, would first have taught us ; equity would first have spared us ; brotherly-kindness would have warned us ; pity would have pardoned us, if we had been found transgressors. God is my witness, that I think honourably of your lordships, esteeming you as brethren, and reverencing you as lords and masters of the congregation. Alas ! then, why have you not some good opinion of us ? Why do you trust known adversaries, and mistrust your brethren ? We confess one faith of Jesus ; we preach one doctrine ; we acknowledge one ruler upon earth : in all

these things we are of your judgment. Shall we then be used thus for the sake of a surplice? Shall brethren persecute brethren for a forked cap, devised for singularity by our enemy? Shall we fight for the *pope's coat*, now that his *head* and his *body* are banished out of the land? Shall the labourers, for lack of this furniture, lack their wages, and the churches their preaching? Shall we not teach, and exercise our talents, as God hath commanded us? My lords, before this take place, consider the cause of the church; the triumphs of antichrist; the laughter of Satan; the sighing and sorrowing of multitudes; the misery and conclusion of the tragedy.

“ I write with zeal, without proof of my matter at present, but not without knowledge of it, nor without grief of mind. God move your spirits at this time to fight against flesh and blood, yea, against innovation, tradition, and the canon law, which are now principally regarded and rewarded. Speak, I humbly beseech you, to the queen's majesty, to the chancellor, to Mr. Secretary and the rest, that these proceedings may sleep; that England may understand your zealous minds towards the worship of God; your love to the poor well-wishers; your hatred to the professed enemies; your unity in true conformity: the other things are neither needful, nor were they ever exacted in any good age. So shall the little flock be bound to you: so shall the great Shepherd be good to you.”*

The infatuated zeal for unprofitable ceremonies, superstitious forms of worship, and the burdensome imposition of them, drove many pious Christians to a total separation from the national worship, when they held their private assemblies, as before related. These servants of God having disallowed all human coercion in religion, entered into a voluntary agreement to strengthen the hands, and comfort the hearts of their brethren; for which purpose, they formed themselves into separate and distinct religious societies, according to the apostolic institutions. These voluntary associations were formed on principle, and cemented by love, their respective members making an open protestation in the presence of their brethren, the substance of which is here presented to the reader's attentive consideration.

* Fresh Suit, part. ii. p. 269.

“ Being thoroughly persuaded in my conscience, by the word and Spirit of God, that the relics of antichrist are abominable in the sight of the Lord ; also, that by the power, mercy and goodness of God, I am escaped the pollution of these detestable traditions, through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ; and that, by the working of the Spirit of Christ, I have joined in prayer and hearing God’s word, with those who have not yielded to these idolatrous inventions, notwithstanding the danger of not coming to my parish church ; therefore I return not again to them who received the marks of the Romish beast :—Because of God’s commandment to avoid them, and to go on to perfection.—Because I will not beautify with my presence those filthy rags, which bring the heavenly word of God into bondage and slavery.—Because I would not communicate with other men’s sins.—Because they give offence both to preacher and hearers.—Because they gladden and encourage the papists in their errors.—Because they persecute our Saviour Jesus Christ in his members, and reject the faithful labourers whom the Lord hath sent into his harvest.—Because the popish garments are now become idols, being exalted above the word of God.—Because they ought to renounce their idolatrous garments.

“ I have, moreover, joined myself to the church of Christ ; wherein I have yielded myself subject to the discipline of God’s word : which, if I should now forsake, and join myself to these traditions, I should forsake the union, by which I am knit to the body of Christ, and join myself to the discipline of antichrist. For in the established church there is no other discipline than that which hath been maintained by the antichristian pope of Rome ; whereby the church of God hath always been afflicted, and is still afflicted at this day.”*

The zealous advocates of freedom were sometimes too rigid in their principles ; but, in general, they espoused the same faith, worship and discipline as all the protestant churches on the continent ; so that while they were with glaring absurdity stigmatized sectaries and schismatics in England, they were esteemed orthodox and religious protestants by all the other

* Strype’s Parker, p. 435.

reformed churches. The sober part of our countrymen were very far from imbibing these erroneous and degrading notions. In the house of commons were many learned and able advocates of a better reformation, and a larger share of Christian freedom; who, notwithstanding the powerful oppositions, ventured upon those measures, and defended those principles, with that zeal and courage which clearly discovered the spark of liberty still in their breasts. These true protestant senators and Christian philanthropists, stung with grief at the intolerance of the times, could not discern any religion in a surplice, a square cap, a scholar's gown, or in any mere ceremonies of worship; while the spiritual courts, pluralities, and nonresidences were repugnant to their very souls.

In the year 1571, no less than seven bills were brought into the house of commons, with a view to redress existing grievances; upon the order of ministers, the residence of pastors, corrupt presentations, leasing of benefices, and similar abuses. These bills were well received in the commons; and upon the prudential measure of a conference with the lords, the queen sent her royal message, that though "she approved of their good endeavours, she would not suffer these things to be ordered by parliament." Not intimidated with this disgraceful message, they persevered in their public discussions; and having passed two of the bills, they sent them up to the lords; where a majority of the lords, among whom were some of the bishops, acknowledged the existing abuses, and the necessity of a further reformation; yet the bills were both rejected.*

Another bill having been introduced into the lower house, to compel her majesty's subjects to attend the public service of the church, and to receive the holy communion, it was firmly opposed as being subversive of the rights of conscience, and extending beyond the cognizance of man. One of the members declared, that no human law ought to force conscience, which is not under the jurisdiction of mortals. "The conscience," said he, "is invisible, and not in the power of the greatest monarch on earth; its limits are not to be straitened, or its bounds to be prescribed, by any policy of man." With respect to forcing men to come to church, and to receive the

* D'Ewes, p. 185, 302.

communion, the one was to him incomprehensible, and the other he disallowed. There was, he said, no example in the primitive church of *commanding*, but only of *exhorting* to the communion. St. Ambrose excommunicated Theodosius, and forbade him the communion, because he was wicked; but for us to command men to come who are wicked, is too strange, and without precedent.*

Notwithstanding her majesty's prohibition, the house of commons ventured to present the ecclesiastical grievances at the foot of the throne, and to inform her highness, that, for want of Christian discipline, great numbers of ministers of infamous lives were pluralists and nonresidents; while those endowed with abilities, and who were willing to labour for the welfare of souls, were cast aside as useless; by which multitudes of her majesty's subjects were in danger of perishing for lack of knowledge. They complained of the great increase of popery, atheism, and licentiousness, by which the protestant religion was in imminent danger; and then add—"Being moved with pity towards so many thousands of your majesty's subjects, daily in danger of being lost for want of the food of the word and true discipline; we, the commons in this present parliament assembled, are humbly bold to open the griefs, and to seek the salving of the sores of our country; and to beseech your majesty, seeing the same is of so great importance, that the parliament at this time may be so long continued, so that by good and godly laws, provision may be made for the reformation of these great and grievous wants and abuses, and by such other means as to your majesty shall seem meet, a perfect redress of the same may be obtained: by which the number of your majesty's faithful subjects will be increased, popery will be destroyed, the glory of God will be promoted, and your majesty's renown will be recommended to all posterity."†

The queen broke up the parliament without taking the least notice of this supplication, seeing it was inconsistent with her supremacy to be at all influenced in matters of religion by the opinions or petitions of her subjects; yet the members of the house declared themselves on this occasion, to be the patrons

* D'Ewes, p. 177.

† Morris' MS. Collec. p. 92, 93.

of liberty and reformation, and discovered those principles which every liberal mind will admire. These proceedings were happily calculated to promote useful knowledge, and to improve the state of the nation.

In the next parliament, Mr. Wentworth made a celebrated speech in the commons, exposing her majesty's encroachment on their rights and privileges, and defending liberty of speech in the free discussion of all subjects which came before them, addressing the house as follows :

“ There was a message, Mr. Speaker, brought the last session into this house, that we should not deal in any matters of religion, but first receive them from the bishops. Surely this was a doleful message ; for it was as much as to say, ‘ Sirs, you shall not deal in God’s cause ; no, you shall in no wise seek to advance his glory : and in recompence of your unkindness, God in his wrath will visit your doings.’ I assure you, Mr. Speaker, there were divers of this house who said with grievous hearts, immediately upon receiving that message, that God in justice would not prosper the session ; for that counsel which cometh not in God’s name, cannot prosper. The great and mighty God, whose name is the Lord of Hosts, great in counsel and infinite in thought, and who is the only good Director of all hearts, was the last session shut out of doors ; which caused many faithful hearts to burst with grief, and all papists, traitors to God and the queen, to laugh the whole parliament to scorn.

“ God did not vouchsafe that his Holy Spirit should, all that session, descend upon the bishops ; so that during that session nothing was done to the advancement of his glory. I have heard of old parliament-men, that the banishment of the pope and popery, and the restoration of true religion, had their beginning in this house ; and not from the bishops : also I have heard that few laws for religion had their foundation from them ; and I do surely think, before God I speak it, that the bishops were the cause of that doleful message, and I will show you what moveth me to think so. In the last parliament, I was sent with some others, to the bishop of Canterbury, for the articles of religion that were then passed this house ; when he asked us, why we had put out of the book, the articles for homilies, consecrating bishops, and such like ?

‘ Surely, Sir,’ said I, ‘ because we were so occupied in other matters, that we had no time to examine how far they agreed with the word of God.’ ‘ What,’ said he, ‘ surely you mistook the matter : you will in those things refer yourselves *wholly to us.*’ ‘ No, by the faith I bear to God,’ said I, ‘ we will pass nothing before we understand what it is ; for that were only to make you popes : make you popes who will,’ said I ; ‘ for we will make you none.’

“ The accepting of such messages, and taking them in good part, is highly offensive to God, and is the acceptation of the breach of the liberties of this honourable house. For is it not the same thing to say, ‘ Sirs, you shall deal in such matters *only*, as to say, you shall *not* deal in such matters ?’ So we might as well have fools and flatterers in the house, as men of sound wisdom, grave judgment, and sincere consciences ; for they being taught what they shall do, can give their consent as well as others. He that hath an office, saith St. Paul, let him wait on his office, or give diligent attendance to it. It is a special part of our duty and office, Mr. Speaker, to maintain the freedom of speech ; for hereby good laws are made, which are for the promotion of God’s glory, and for the preservation of the prince and state.”*

The suffering clergy, despairing of relief from every other quarter, made application in 1584, to the house of commons. We are told, that on the day of the parliament’s assembling, their agents were soliciting at the door of the house all the day, and making interest in the evening at the chambers of parliament-men : nor would they have failed being made easy, if the queen would have taken the advice of her two houses.† Three petitions were presented to the commons in one day, to restore liberty to faithful ministers, to secure their continuance in their functions, and to obtain a supply of able men for the bereaved churches. Dr. Turner, at the same time, reminded the house of a bill and book which he had formerly offered to their consideration, concerning the subscription of the clergy ; which tended only, as he conceived, to the glory of God, the safety of her majesty, and the welfare of the nation. He moreover requested that it might be adopted by act of parliament, and that no eccle-

* D'Ewes, p. 236—241.

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 456.

siastical jurisdiction might extend farther than to heresy and immorality, as condemned in Scripture. The book chiefly related to the qualification and admission of ministers, to the restraint of the high commission, to the censure of excommunication, to the permission of religious exercises, and to take away pluralities and nonresidence ; and was by the advice of the house reduced to sixteen articles ; which the commons submitted to the consideration of the upper house, that they might be jointly exhibited by way of humble suit to the queen. But the lords, especially the bishops, opposed the design. Archbishop Whitgift said he could not but wonder, that wise men should consent to the exhibition of these articles, some of which tended only to needless innovation, liberty, and the overthrow of the ecclesiastical government ; against which he was much opposed, both from conscience, and his duty to the church. Her majesty, he said, disliked such innovations ; and, in his opinion, she acted graciously and wisely, since the laws and orders already established could not justly be impeached ; therefore, notwithstanding the hard opinion which some persons had of him, he could not help exerting himself to the uttermost, to confirm her majesty in these sentiments.*

The worthy endeavours of the commons being thus defeated, they introduced several bills, “to clip the wings of the bishops, to weaken or destroy their courts,” and to ease the subjects of their present intolerable burdens. One of these bills was against pluralities and nonresidence, and for the allowance of the subjects’ appeal from the bishops’ courts, to a higher tribunal. The bill passed the house without difficulty ; but was warmly opposed in the lords, particularly by the two archbishops and the bishop of Winchester, who affirmed that neither cathedrals, nor professors in the universities, could subsist without them : so by their episcopal influence, the bill was cast out.

This spiritual conquest did not frighten the commons from their principles, or intimidate them in their munificent and worthy efforts. They resumed the debate on the other bills, with a view to diminish the exorbitant power of the spiritual courts, and to restrain the almost boundless episcopal jurisdic-

* Strype’s Whitgift, p. 176—183.

tion. One of them was to require the archbishops and bishops to take an oath in the courts of Westminster, that in their proceedings they would do nothing contrary to the laws of the land ; another was to reduce their fees ; a third for liberty to marry at all times of the year ; a fourth for reforming church discipline ; a fifth upon the qualification of ministers. Two of these bills without difficulty passed the house ; which so alarmed the archbishop, that he addressed a letter next morning to the queen, informing her of their disobedience to her royal orders. He signified that notwithstanding the charge which her highness had lately given to the lower house of parliament, not to discuss subjects relating to the church, they had the preceding day passed a bill concerning the ministry ! Besides other inconveniences, he said, that if this bill should be once passed by parliament, it could not in future be altered without parliament, adding—"whereas if it be but as a canon from us by your majesty's authority, it may be observed or altered at your pleasure. They have also passed a bill," said he, "giving liberty to marry at all times of the year, contrary to the *old canons* continually observed among us ; and containing matter which tendeth to the slander of the church, as having *hitherto maintained an error.*"*

The reason last mentioned was very extraordinary from the pen of a protestant archbishop, and the former, relating to the constant observance of the old popish canons, was certainly very little better. The queen was so exceedingly gratified with this advice, which would reserve the power of making laws for the church in her own hands, that she immediately sent a message to the commons, reprimanding them for encroaching upon her supremacy, and for attempting to do what she had forbidden, with which she was highly offended : commanding the speaker at the same time, "to see that no bills concerning reformation in ecclesiastical causes should be there exhibited, and if they were exhibited, not to read them !!"†

Her majesty's arbitrary measures did not prevent her subjects from breathing English air, from thinking and judging for themselves, or from their continued zealous efforts to obtain deliverance from their intolerable burdens. They, there-

* Strype's Whitgift, p. 187, 198.

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 458.

fore, presented "A supplication to their sovereign lady queen Elizabeth, to the lords of her most honourable privy-council, and to the high court of parliament;" in which they declared, that great numbers of faithful pastors were silenced from preaching, and that they had none to break unto them the bread of life, or to teach them the holy word of God, as by the laws of God and the realm was commanded, further addressing them in these words:

"We do most humbly beseech your highness and honours, to call to your remembrance, that they who do well should receive praise and comfort of the powers which bear the sword of God. And we humbly beseech you to understand, that this hard handling of our good pastors brings us into great distresses. Also that it may please you to receive information of our poor estate, who feel the sore and smart of it. For when our bishops deprive our preaching pastors of their livings, and stop their mouths, so that they cannot teach us the will of the Lord God Almighty; they take upon them to do that for which they must give an account to God; whose ministers they forbid to serve his divine Majesty. And while they think hereby to punish our good pastors, they indeed stick us with the dart of death. For they take from us the bread of life, and leave us destitute of instruction and comfort in God: and we humbly beseech the Lord God to judge this cause according to his good pleasure.

"We have, indeed, great need of those pastors who can and will truly teach us the way of the Lord. We have no need at all of such idle ceremonies, as do not edify us in true godliness; and it is very requisite that godly rulers take heed how they burden the church of Christ with things called indifferent. In time they may become intolerable burdens. For things indifferent pressed upon the church by the authority of man, often breed much hurt. We have by experience proved that cold ceremonies in the church weaken the power of the doctrine of the cross of Christ; because in them is neither spirit nor life. The observance of such dead and unprofitable ceremonies, is no part of that sacrifice which is made to God by the preaching of the Gospel. To take preaching from us, and to give us instead of it bare reading, furnished with idle and unprofitable ceremonies, is to take from us the bread of

life, which God has prepared for us ; and to feed us with the device of man—with unprofitable hearing and looking. We call it *unprofitable* ; because our dulness is not thereby quickened, nor our minds stirred up to understand the mind of God, or to embrace that which is contained in his word. It is our great grief to have our comfortable and profitable preaching pastors taken from us, for such unprofitable ceremonies.”*

The oppressed servants of God, having testified their attachment to the queen, their zeal for the protestant religion, and their love to their country, by the aid which they afforded in the destruction of the Spanish Armada, renewed their attempt to obtain a greater portion of liberty, when they presented another petition to the house of commons for favour in the article of subscription. Their petition was no sooner delivered, than one of the members rose, and moved the house to make inquiry how far the bishops had exceeded the laws, in the prosecution of her majesty’s protestant subjects. Notwithstanding the queen’s former prohibitions, the house moved for the revival of the bill against pluralities and nonresidence, which received the approbation of the majority ; when it was again introduced, and passed the commons without difficulty. In the upper house, it met with a repulse. Her majesty forbade the lords from proceeding upon it ; and, at the same time, she commanded those members of the commons to be immediately taken into custody, who had dared to act contrary to her orders. The clergy in convocation were so exceedingly alarmed with this bill, that they petitioned the queen to protect the church ; and having flattered her majesty with the title of *goddess*, they assured her, “ that the passing of such a bill would be attended with the decay of learning, and introduce confusion and barbarism into the church ! ” Their flattery and their arguments being irresistible, she interposed her power, and suppressed the bill.†

These arbitrary measures instead of annihilating the small remains of free inquiry, and of the right of private judgment, greatly contributed to open the eyes of the people, and to diffuse better principles in all directions. A noble attempt was now made by Mr. James Morrice, attorney of the court of

* Strype, vol. iii. p. 222.

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 461, 462.

wards, a most able and learned barrister, and an avowed advocate of the reformation, and the liberties of the people. He said in the house of commons, " My religion towards God, my allegiance to her majesty, and the many oaths I have taken to maintain her supremacy, cause me to offer to your consideration certain matters concerning the sacred Majesty of God, the prerogative and supremacy of the queen, the privileges of the laws, and the liberties of us all." He then moved the house to inquire, how far the high commissioners could justify their proceedings against faithful and godly ministers, by inquisition, subscription, and binding them to their good behaviour, contrary to the honour of God, the queen's regal government, the laws of the realm; and the liberty of her majesty's subjects; their compelling them to take oaths to accuse themselves, in their own private thoughts, words, and actions; and their proceeding to deprivation or degradation upon such accusation: but if they refused to take this oath, they were committed to prison, and there detained during their pleasure, and not released till they took an oath of canonical conformity. He, therefore, prayed the house to take their affecting case into serious consideration, and to devise some method of redressing these enormities; after which he offered to the house two bills, one against inquisition upon the oath *ex officio*, and the other against the illegal imprisonment of her majesty's subjects, and to the latter he begged the immediate attention of the house.

Sir Francis Knollys, one of her majesty's privy-council, and one of the first statesmen of the age, seconded the motion, and said, that in his opinion those abuses ought to be reformed; that if the bishops had acted contrary to law, they were in a premunire; that after the reformation of king Henry VIII. no bishop practised superiority over his brethren; that in Edward VIth.'s time a statute was made, that bishops should keep their courts in the king's name; and though the statute was repealed by queen Mary, and not since revived, yet it was doubtful by what authority bishops kept courts in their own name; because it was manifestly against the prerogative for any subject to hold a court without express warrant from the crown.

Mr. Beal, clerk of her majesty's council, spoke on the same

side, and added—that the bishops had certainly incurred a *premunire*; because the statute of the 13th of Elizabeth required subscription to the articles of *faith only*, and that no councils or canons gave authority to bishops to frame articles and require subscription at pleasure. But for his noble speech in defence of the rights and liberties of the subject, against the illegal proceedings of the bishops, Beal was expelled from the parliament, and forbidden to come to court, by the queen's sovereign command !*

These debates awakened the civilians in the commons, who being mostly advocates of all her majesty's proceedings, opposed the reading of the bill; which immediately roused the attention of the queen, who sent for the speaker, and commanded him to inform the commons, that the calling and dissolving of parliaments, with the assenting to any bills passed there, was part of her prerogative; and that the calling of the present parliament was only that such as neglected the service of the church, might be compelled to it by some sharp laws, the better to provide for the safety of her person and the realm; that it was not meant that they should meddle with matters of *state* or causes *ecclesiastical*; that she wondered they should attempt a thing so contrary to her commandment; that she was highly offended with their conduct; and that it was her royal pleasure that no bill, relating to any *matters of state* and causes *ecclesiastical*, should be there exhibited.†

This singular message was sent to the commons by that queen, whose character and reign afford so many subjects of panegyric, to those who would in the present age be styled the friends of religious freedom! When the speaker charged the commons that they should not introduce bills relating either to *matters of state*, or to *causes ecclesiastical*, Mr. Attorney Morrice, for his bold adventure, was seized in the house by a serjeant at arms, discharged from his office in the court of the duchy of Lancaster, disabled from his practice as barrister at law, and kept some years prisoner in Tutbury castle!

The attention of the reader has been already directed to her majesty's imperious conduct towards the pious and learned archbishop Grindal, when with considerable sharpness she

* D'Ewes. p. 474.—Strype's Whitgift, p. 388. † Warner, vol. ii. p. 464.

commanded him to abridge the number of preachers, and to suppress the religious exercises, declaring that reading homilies was all that was necessary. Upon these important points the pious and venerable primate, in his excellent letter to the queen, vindicated the rights and privileges of the Christian church, against the encroachment of her majesty's arbitrary power ; and showed his determination to claim and exercise liberty of conscience, by obeying God rather than men, whenever they might attempt to rob the church of divine institutions. With pious zeal and Christian heroism, he refused to obey the pretended supremacy. This was an heroic defence of religious freedom, and deserves to be recorded as a useful lesson to future generations.

“ I cannot marvel enough,” says he, “ how this strange opinion should once enter into your mind, that it will be good for the church to have few preachers. Alas ! madam, is the Scripture more plain in any one thing, than that the Gospel of Christ should be plentifully preached, and that plenty of labourers should be sent into the Lord's harvest, which being large standeth in need not of a few, but of many workmen ? There was appointed to the building of Solomon's material temple, one hundred and fifty thousand artificers and labourers, besides three thousand three hundred overseers ; and shall we think that a few preachers may suffice to build and edify the spiritual temple of Christ, which is his church ? Christ, when he sent forth his apostles, said to them, ‘ Go ye into *all the world*, and preach the Gospel to *every creature*.’ But all God's creatures cannot be instructed in the Gospel, unless all possible means be used to have multitudes of preachers and teachers, to preach to them. St. Paul saith to the Colossians : ‘ Let the word of Christ dwell among you richly ;’ and to Timothy : ‘ Preach the word ; be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort.’ Which things cannot be done without often and much preaching. To this agreeth the practice of Christ's apostles ; ‘ Who appointed elders in *every church*.’ St. Paul to Titus, saith ; ‘ For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in *every city*.’ He afterwards describes how the said elders were to be qualified : not such as we are compelled to admit by mere necessity, unless we should

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leave a great number of churches utterly desolate, but such indeed as are ‘able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.’ And in this I beseech your majesty to notice one thing necessary to be observed; which is, that if the Holy Ghost prescribe expressly that preachers should be placed in *every* town or city; how can it be well thought, that three or four preachers may suffice for a shire?

“Public and continual preaching of God’s word, is the ordinary mean and instrument of the salvation of mankind. St. Paul calls it the ministry of reconciliation of man to God. By the preaching of God’s word, the glory of God is enlarged, faith is nourished, and charity is increased. By it the ignorant are instructed, the negligent excited, the stubborn rebuked, the weak comforted, and, to all those that sin of malicious wickedness, the wrath of God is threatened. By preaching, also, due obedience to Christian princes and magistrates is planted in the hearts of subjects. For obedience proceedeth of conscience; conscience is grounded upon the word of God; the word of God worketh this effect by preaching. So that generally where preaching is wanting, obedience faileth.

“When your majesty hath considered and well weighed the premises, I trust you will rest satisfied, and judge that no such inconveniences can grow from the exercises, as you have been informed, but rather directly the contrary. And for my own part, because I am very well assured, both by reason and arguments taken out of the holy Scriptures, and by experience, (the most certain seal of knowledge) that these exercises for the exposition of the Scriptures, and for exhortation and comfort drawn from them, are profitable both to increase knowledge among the ministers, and to edify the hearers; I am forced, therefore, with all humility and yet plainly, to profess that I *cannot*, with a *safe conscience*, and *without offence to the Majesty of God*, give my assent to the suppressing of the said exercises: much less can I send out *any injunction* for the utter and universal subversion of them. I say with St. Paul: ‘I have no power for destruction, but only for edification;’ and with the same apostle: ‘I can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.’

“Bear with me, I beseech you, madam, if I choose to offend your earthly majesty, rather than to offend the heavenly Ma-

jesty of God. Remember always that in God's cause, the will of God, and not the will of any earthly creature, is to take place. It is the *antichristian* voice of the *pope*, to say : ' So I will have it : so I command : let my will stand for a reason.' In God's matters, all princes ought to bow their sceptres to the Son of God, and to ask counsel at his mouth what they shall do. David exhorts kings and rulers, ' To serve God with fear and trembling.' Although you are a mighty prince, remember that He who dwelleth in Heaven is mightier. The Psalmist says, ' He taketh away the spirit of princes, and is terrible above all the kings of the earth.' Wherefore, I beseech you, madam, in the bowels of Jesus Christ, that when you deal in these religious causes, you will set the Majesty of God before your eyes, laying aside all earthly majesty : determine with yourself to obey *his voice*, and, with all humility, say to him, *Not my will, but thy will be done.*"*

The good old archbishop thus recommended Elizabeth to yield her own supremacy in absolute subjection to the supremacy of God, for which, to her great infamy, as already stated, the haughty lady poured her royal indignation upon the head of the right reverend father. There were at this time many able and respectable advocates of Christian freedom, and suffering humanity ; among whom may be classed lord Burleigh, lord North, the earls of Bedford, Shrewsbury, Leicester, and Warwick, Sir Francis Walsingham, and Sir Francis Knollys. These were the constant friends of the oppressed puritans, employing their power and influence to procure a better reformation. In the latter they absolutely failed ; but they frequently shielded the persecuted ministers, or procured their release from suspension, deprivation, or imprisonment.

King James of Scotland became a zealous patron of this good cause. He professed to be a decided friend to liberty of conscience ; therefore he sent his royal petitions to Elizabeth, desiring the exercise of greater moderation, and the release of certain persecuted ministers, confined in prison for the sake of a good conscience. In one of these petitions, he addressed the queen as follows :

" Hearing of the apprehension of Mr. Udal, Mr. Cart-

* Strype's Grindal, Appen. p. 74.

wright and certain other ministers of the Gospel within your realm ; of whose good erudition and faithful travails in the church, we hear a very credible commendation, howsoever their diversity from the bishops and others of your clergy, in matters touching their consciences, hath been a mean to work them your misliking ; we cannot, weighing the duty which we owe to such as are afflicted for their consciences in that profession, but by our most affectionate and earnest letter, interpose ourselves at your hands to stay any harder usage of them for that cause : requesting you most earnestly, that, for our cause and intercession, it may please you to let them be relieved of their present strait, and every further accusation or pursuit depending on that ground, respecting their former merit in setting forth the Gospel, the simplicity of their consciences in this defence, their hinderance by compulsion, and the great slander which could not fail to appear upon their further suffering on any such occasion.”*

These royal supplications proved ineffectual. In matters of religion, the queen was resolved to gratify no one but herself, resting every thing on her own unbounded prerogative. The endeavours of the sufferers, with those of their numerous friends, having proved unsuccessful, and being wearied with repeated applications to their superiors, they despaired of ever obtaining redress in this way. They held their private classical associations in Essex, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, London, Cambridge, and other places, consulting among themselves upon the most proper methods of promoting Christian discipline, and a purer reformation. In one of their assemblies, they came to this conclusion :—“ That since the magistrates could not be induced to reform the discipline of the church, it was lawful, after waiting so many years, to act without them, and to introduce a reformation in the best manner they could.” Having also revised their book, entitled “ The Holy Discipline of the Church, described in the Word of God,” it was subscribed by five hundred ministers, and adopted as their directory in ecclesiastical matters. Their notions of religious liberty were, in many respects, very cloudy and erroneous, especially when they sought to have their own views

* Fuller, b. ix. p. 203.

of church government established by legislative authority. For had they been successful in these attempts, their ecclesiastical polity would, most probably, have been enforced by some intolerant and persecuting law.

These attempts to obtain the establishment of the model of discipline, were not confined to the reforming clergy; but various efforts of a similar kind were made in the house of commons. The majority of the members having agreed to the propriety of the measure, the house presented a petition to the queen, humbly requesting that it might be adopted. The specific sentiments of this petition do not appear; but the queen returned the following most gracious answer:—"Her majesty is fully resolved, by her own reading and princely judgment, upon the truth of the present reformation, and mindeth not now to begin to settle herself in matters of religion. Her majesty hath fully considered, not only the exceptions against the present reformation, and finds them frivolous, but also the platform that is desired, and accounteth it most prejudicial to the religion established, to her crown, her government, and her subjects." She then openly claimed that ecclesiastical power and supremacy which had formerly been usurped by the pope, and concluded by rejecting their petition.*

Her majesty's health began at length visibly to decline; and it soon appeared that her end was fast approaching. The last scene of her life was cloudy and disconsolate. She died March 24, 1603; in the seventieth year of her age, and the forty-fifth of her reign. Queen Elizabeth was remarkably fond of the external pomp of worship, and zealous for the outward profession of the protestant religion; but was "totally destitute of the power of it, on her conscience and her conduct. Her imperious temper; her feminine vanity; her duplicity and cruelty; and a multitude of acts utterly inconsistent with the purity and gentleness of the religion of the Son of God, might be consistent with the character of a *great queen*, but were utterly incompatible with that of a *good Christian*."†

Had queen Elizabeth and her parliament abolished all the penal laws in religion, and all the remnants of antichristian

* Strype's Whitgift, p. 259, 260.

† Haweis, vol. ii. p. 483.

usurpation ; had they absolutely declined imposing their own religion upon the people, allowing Christianity to rest on its only proper foundation, to take its own course, and work its own way ; had they guaranteed to all peaceable subjects, the unmolested and unrestricted enjoyment of religious freedom, as the heaven-born inheritance of man ; and had they zealously promoted their own views of divine truth and Christian worship, without coercive interference with those of other persons ; —had all these points been regarded and kept inviolably sacred, their Christian liberality, their good sense, their regard for public justice, as well as individual rights, would have been the admiration of all mankind, almost innumerable cruelties would have been prevented, the reign of Elizabeth preserved from the foulest stains, and undefiled religion and social happiness, without party prejudice and political animosity, have been promoted throughout the rising empire. Queen Elizabeth was superstitiously fond of outward magnificence ; but when her best ministers died, her glory departed. Mere female affections, intrigues, resentments, filled up the catalogue of her deeds. Her passions swayed her, and caprice and tyranny were the leading marks of her character.

Having given a circumstantial account of the arduous conflict in the cause of religious freedom, it will not be deemed improper to direct the reader's attention to the actual state of religion during this protracted period. While the queen and her bishops assumed so high a tone, and proceeded to such lengths of intolerance, to secure uniformity in the external profession of religion, the church and religion were in a most deplorable state. The number of suspensions and deprivations of this reign are said to have amounted to several thousands, and comprehended at one time even a third part of all the clergy in the kingdom. Most of the conforming clergy were awfully deficient in learning, abilities, and piety, while the ignorant people stood in the greatest need of religious instruction. In general the utmost they could do was to read the Common-prayer and homilies ; but they were conformable in outward ceremonies, and so gave perfect satisfaction to those in power.*

* Hume's Hist. vol. v. p. 337.—Strype's Whitgift, p. 121.

The church was at the same time in great danger from another quarter. While the spiritual rulers were incessantly harassing and ruining the most firm and zealous protestants, the papists were sapping the very foundations of the church of England. Roman catholic priests and zealous missionaries came over in great numbers to this country, and made numerous proselytes from the national church. Popery greatly increased in every part of the kingdom, and among all ranks in society; so that the falling away of her majesty's subjects to the Romish communion, occasioned considerable alarm to the queen's government.* Notwithstanding the severity of the laws against the catholics, in some parts of the country, especially in Yorkshire, they went openly to mass; and they were so numerous that the protestants stood in awe of them.

The state of morality and religion presented a very melancholy picture. The queen's subjects lived dissolutely and luxuriously, without the fear of God, care of honesty, and in defiance of the civil constitution. The service of the church was generally neglected, and the substantials of religion were very little regarded, both among the clergy and laity, through the violent contention for a mere outward profession and ritual observances. Churchmen heaped many benefices upon themselves, and resided upon none, neglecting their cures. Many of them alienated the church lands, made unreasonable leases, and wasted the woods belonging to them, granting reversions and advowsons for their own benefit. The churches fell greatly into decay, and became so filthy and indecent, that they were unfit for the worship of God. Among the laity there was very little devotion. The Lord's day was shamefully profaned; and the common-prayers were generally disregarded. Some lived in the total neglect of the service of God; while many others were mere heathens and atheists. Her majesty's court was the very harbour of epicures and atheists, and a kind of lawless place, seeing it stood in no parish. These melancholy facts made good men fear that some terrible judgments were impending over the nation.†

The picture is not distorted. It is supported by unexceptionable authority, and corroborated by the most glaring facts.

* Strype, vol. iii. p. 292, 619, 620. † Strype's Parker, p. 147, 395.

The vast renown of queen Elizabeth and her government, consisted in wealth, and strength, and outward magnificence; while genuine religion or undefiled Christianity was at a very low ebb. Under a pretence of maintaining order and uniformity in external worship, popery, immorality, and irreligion were every where promoted: so that while the zealous prelates pretended to be building up the church of England, they were not only destroying the rights and liberties of the people, but evidently undermining the church of God.

Although this was the general state of religion, there was, during this reign, a goodly number of living evidences of pure Christianity. Many of their writings bear ample testimony at this day, of the excellence of their authors; while their exemplary deportment, and zeal in their adorable Master's service, demonstrate the power and prevalence of undefiled religion. Some of the bishops and other clergy of this period, being laborious pastors, edified the flock of Christ, by their example, preaching, and writings; and it is certain, that many of those who did not conform to the establishment, were ministers equally pious, learned, and exemplary, adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour by the holiness of their lives. Notwithstanding the weight of authority against them, their number and reputation continually increased. The holy lives, and triumphant deaths of many of this generation, are on record. Their flourishing congregations, and the attention which the people paid to their faithful labours, discover the relish which they had for the truths of the Gospel, and their desire to be "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

CHAPTER VI.

THE REIGN OF KING JAMES I.



SECTION I.

The Oppressive Measures of the Court destructive of Christian Liberty.

JAMES, king of Scotland, and son of Mary queen of Scots, succeeded the renowned Elizabeth to the crown of England. This unpromising event gave great uneasiness to the bishops, who at first were much alarmed for the safety of their ecclesiastical establishment. James was born of Roman catholic parents ; but was taken from his mother in his infancy, educated in the protestant religion, and all the rigours of Scotch Presbyterianism. When arrived at years of maturity, he professed, on many public occasions, his decided attachment to the presbyterian worship ; praising God, “ that he was born in the time of the light of the Gospel, and in such a place, as to be king of the purest kirk in the world. As for our neighbour kirk of England, their service is an evil-said mass in English : they want nothing of the mass but the liftings,” meaning the elevation of the host.* He had awakened the jealousy of the English bishops by declaring, “ that their order smelled vilely of popish pride ; that they were a principal branch of the pope, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh ; that the Book of Common-prayer was the English mass-book ; and that the surplice, copes, and ceremonies were outward badges of popery.” On one public occasion, he said—“ I charge you, my good ministers, doctors, elders, nobles, gentlemen, and barons, to stand to your purity, and to exhort the people to do the same ; and I, forsooth, as long as I brook my life, shall maintain the same.”†

* Calderwood’s Hist. p. 256.

† Hist. of Stuarts, vol. i. p. 595.

These were the professions of his majesty's strong attachment to the *presbyterian* church, and of his unequivocal disapprobation of the English prelacy and forms of worship. James's puritanical education, followed by these open declarations, produced painful surmises in the breasts of the English bishops, who often expressed their alarming apprehensions of "the Scotch mist." Upon the king's arrival in England, the people showed the strongest demonstrations of joy in all the towns through which he passed; and such were their acclamations and praises, that a plain Scotchman could not forbear saying, "This people will spoil so good a king."*

James's principal object after his accession, was to maintain the royal prerogative in its utmost extent, and even to carry it higher than his predecessors. He considered the authority of sovereigns over their subjects as unlimited, and that all monarchical governments ought to be absolute; but these maxims could not be applied to the English government, without destroying the constitution. He was, moreover, strongly prepossessed in favour of his own abilities and goodness; and his courtiers having beheld this leading feature in his character, embraced all opportunities of applauding his mental endowments, and of extolling his unbounded regal power. As this kind of flattery was the most gratifying to his vanity; so it was the sure way to gain his favour and to obtain promotion.†

The bishops adopted the most prompt measures of securing his majesty's favour. Immediately upon the death of Elizabeth, they sent a special agent to Scotland in the name of all the bishops and clergy of England, to congratulate the king on his accession, to assure him of their unfeigned loyalty, to signify their readiness to receive any commands which he might be disposed to give, and to recommend the church of England to his royal countenance and protection. The messenger was most graciously received, and ordered to assure the bishops of his majesty's favourable attention to the object of their request; which served to raise their spirits and dissipate their gloom. His majesty soon discovered on many occasions, "his hatred of the Scotch kirk, gratifying his resentment without consulting his interests." But James had, pro-

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 159.

† Ibid. p. 160.

perly speaking, no other religion than that which flowed from a principle which he called “king-craft;”* as the sequel of this reign will amply illustrate and prove.

The leading character of this monarch, soon appeared at the Hampton-court conference. This famed conference, and all the disputants, were appointed by the king. On the side of the church were nine bishops and the same number of dignitaries; and for the puritans four learned divines. As the puritan ministers were absent the first day, the king opened the conference by stating his reasons for consulting the bishops and dignitaries alone; also declaring “the happiness which he felt in being brought to the promised land, where he was not, as formerly, a king without state and honour, nor in a place where order was banished, and beardless boys would brave him to his face.”

On the second day the puritan divines being called, presented their request for a further reformation, and for an enlargement of Christian liberty, which occasioned much debate; but it would be tedious to the reader to enter into these disputations. The king took more upon himself than that of a moderator, and very frequently left the bishops nothing more to do, than to admire and applaud his behaviour; often concluding the points discussed with a maxim which he took up with the crown of England, “no bishop, no king.” At the close of the second day, his majesty arose from his chair, loudly exclaiming, “If this be all your party have to say, I will make them conform, or I will hurry them out of the land, or else do worse.” In the conclusion, he said—“I will have none of this arguing. Let them conform, and that quickly, or they shall hear of it.”† Such was the royal logic of the new monarch! Throughout this remarkable conference, on every point that was moved or discussed, the king, says a learned churchman, showed such knowledge and readiness as raised the admiration of all his hearers!‡

The puritan divines were evidently brow-beaten and insulted by the king, whose deportment was admired and applauded by the political prelates, who styled him, “The Solomon of

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 477.—Burnet, vol. i. p. 7, 9.

† Barlow's Conference, p. 170, 177.

‡ Echard, p. 380.

the age." Bishop Bancroft fell upon his knees, and said, "I protest my heart melteth for joy, that Almighty God, of his singular mercy, has given us such a king, as since Christ's time hath not been;" and archbishop Whitgift, in raptures, exclaimed, "that he was verily persuaded the king spoke by the Spirit of God!"* But this *mock* conference was only a blind to introduce episcopacy into Scotland;† yet it taught all persons of liberal minds what to expect from a monarch, and from prelates, of such overbearing intolerance.

After this disgraceful conference, his majesty issued two royal proclamations; in the former of which, he intimated how great a regard he should have for the tender consciences of the *papists*: but in the other, he commanded all his protestant subjects, as well ecclesiastical as civil, to conform to the Book of Common-prayer, as the only public form of serving God allowed to be used in the realm, and all the bishops, with other public ministers, to see the proclamation fully executed, punishing all offenders. He also signified, that they should not attempt any alteration of the public form of worshipping God; neither would he give way to any who might presume that his judgment would be swayed to any alteration by the suggestions of others. Thus king James, like his royal predecessor, concluded that the political church was unalterably established, and accordingly opposed with firmness every attempt to promote a further reformation.‡

The king having summoned his first parliament, delivered a long address to his two houses, unfolding his high pretensions of candour to papists, and his severe animadversions on the patrons of greater religious freedom, in these words:

"Since my entry into this kingdom, I have both by meeting with divers of the ecclesiastical state, and likewise by proclamations, clearly declared my mind on points of religion; yet do I not think it amiss in this solemn audience, that I should take occasion to discover the secrets of my heart in that matter: I shall never, with God's grace, be ashamed to make a public profession thereof on all occasions, lest God should be ashamed to profess and allow me before men and angels.

* Welwood, p. 21. † Kennet, vol. ii. p. 665. ‡ Strype's Whitgift, p. 587.

“ At my first coming, although I found but one religion, and that which by myself is professed, publicly allowed, and by law maintained ; yet found I another sort of religion, besides a private sect, lurking within the bowels of this nation. The first is the true religion, which by me is professed, and by law is established : The second is the falsely called catholics, but truly papists : The third, which I call a sect, rather than a religion, is the puritans and novelists ; who do not so far differ from us in points of religion, as in their confused form of policy and purity : being ever discontented with the present government, and impatient to suffer any superiority, which makes their sect unsufferable in any well-governed commonwealth. As for my course towards them, I remit it to my proclamations made upon that subject.

“ As for the papists, I must put a difference betwixt my own private profession of my own salvation, and my politic government of the realm. Concerning my own profession, you have me your head now amongst you, of the same religion as the body ; as I am no stranger to you in blood, no more am I a stranger to you in faith, or in the matters concerning the house of God. Although this my profession be according to my education, wherein, I thank God, I sucked the milk of God’s truth, with the milk of my nurse ; yet do I protest unto you, that I would never have so firmly kept my first profession, if I had not found it agreeable to all reason, and to the rule of my conscience. But I was never violent, nor unreasonable in my profession : I acknowledge the *Roman* church to be our *Mother* church, although defiled with some infirmities and corruptions.”

His majesty having expressed his desires of a friendly union of the two churches so nearly related, adds—“ I could wish from my heart, that it would please God to make me one of the members of such a general Christian union in religion, as laying wilfulness aside on both hands, we might meet in the midst, which is the centre and perfection of all things. For if they would leave and be ashamed of such new and gross corruptions of theirs, as themselves cannot maintain, nor deny to be worthy of reformation, I would for my part be content to meet them in the *mid-way*, so that all novelties might be renounced on either side.”*

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 165, 166.

Notwithstanding the large share of self-admiration which James possessed, for making speeches and for kingcraft, he completely failed of *deceiving*, or even of *pleasing* the parliament; both of which he attempted. The two houses were disgusted with his tedious verbose harangue, full of himself, his own praise, his prerogative, and his power; and they considered the greatest part of it as extremely ludicrous. All parties were displeased with that which the king himself so much admired. With flagrant absurdity he affirmed, that he was a true member of the church of England, and his faith was grounded on the holy Scriptures; yet that he was ready to lay aside all prejudice, and to meet the catholics *half-way*.* King James, however, advanced one important sentiment, concerning the better sort of catholics, well worthy of the head and heart of any prince. "I would be sorry," said he, "to punish their *bodies* for the errors of their *minds*, the reformation whereof *only comes from God*."†

It will not be necessary to detain the reader by inquiring what the king meant by calling the church of Rome the *mother* church, or what he intended by his friendly offers of a conjunction with the papists; but his majesty was evidently resolved to rule the puritans by proclamations, and to punish with great severity all who scrupled conformity, as he had unequivocally declared at the Hampton-court conference. The faithful servants of God, were not intimidated by these royal threatenings. They still sought a greater portion of liberty for themselves and the church of God, and continued unconformable to the traditions and impositions of men. This awakened the zeal of the potent monarch, who issued another proclamation, dated July 10, 1604, allowing them to consider of their conformity till the end of November following: but in case of their refusal, he would have them all deprived, or banished from the kingdom.

The convocation assembled at the same time with the parliament, and having chosen Dr. Richard Bancroft, bishop of London, to the office of prolocutor, the book of canons was introduced and adopted, consisting of one hundred and forty-one articles. While the canons were preparing, a petition was

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 486.

† Journals of Com. for 1603.

presented from the lower house, for a reformation of the Book of Common-prayer ; but the upper house refused to receive it, and Bancroft, with some of his brethren, admonished the petitioners to obedience and conformity before Midsummer, or they should certainly feel the censures of the church. The canons having passed the convocation, were ratified by the king's letters patent under the great seal, being the same as those now in force in the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline.*

At the conclusion of the convocation, bishop Bancroft delivered a speech to the learned synod, addressing them in these remarkable words ;—" Men and brethren, the reverend fathers of this convocation, as they always meditate on the law of God, and every part of it, both by day and night, so especially do they lay to heart those passages of holy writ, which properly concern their office : as, ' Woe be unto me if I preach not the Gospel : ' and ' Simon, lovest thou me ? Feed my sheep. ' From these considerations, being carried with a fervent zeal both of preaching in their several places themselves, and of procuring more faithful preachers, and more fruitful preaching throughout the land ; they have *over* and *above* the institutions of Christ, appointed certain ceremonies strictly to be observed by every minister : So that whosoever shall hereafter upon any pretence refuse to observe the same, they shall be esteemed *factions*, *schismatical*, *disorderly*, and *exorbitant* ; and for that cause they shall be suspended and deprived. But for the preventing of such mischief, your *tender* mother would have you to understand by my mouth, that if any man be *thrust* out of the ministry for not yielding to these constitutions, though they may seem to him such as the church cannot lawfully appoint, or he observe ; yet is *he author of his own silencing* : therefore you must all be exhorted to consider well of the above portions of Scripture, which have so much prevailed with your careful mother."†

When uninspired and fallible men appoint things to be observed by the ministers of God, " over and above the institutions of Christ," it is an open impeachment of his wisdom and goodness, in not providing all those institutions which the future exigences of the church might require, and that were ne-

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 487.

† Fresh Suit, part iii. p. 15, 16.

cessary or desirable to promote its future welfare. But when these ministers were thrust out of the ministry, for refusing to declare they believed that which they could not believe, and to approve and practise those things against which their very souls revolted; to affirm that they were the authors of their own silencing, was surely as flagrant an instance of priestcraft and falsehood as ever was obtruded upon an enslaved world; and to give the church of England the flattering title of “tender mother,” while propagating this delusion, and promoting these oppressions, was certainly very little better.

The speech of the prolocutor was a clear indication of the approaching storm. To give the reader a brief abstract of the long train of canons, would be equally offensive to his understanding, and disgusting to his heart; he would certainly conclude, that such nauseous superstition and cruel oppression was an indelible disgrace to a protestant convocation, and only fit for the Roman conclave. Whitgift’s three articles were incorporated in one of these canons, when every clergyman was required, avoiding all ambiguities, to subscribe *willingly* and *from his heart*, to all things contained in them. The same subscription is required of all clergymen at the present day. To fasten this subscription on the consciences of the learned prelates, and other ecclesiastics, the said canon also threatens, that “if any bishop shall ordain or license any minister, except he first subscribe in manner and form here appointed, he shall be suspended from giving orders and licenses for the space of twelve months: but if any of the universities shall therein offend, we leave them to the danger of the law, and his majesty’s censure.”

The terrors and judgments denounced by these canons against those who scrupled conformity were unparalleled in the history of the reformation; so that numerous and shocking additional hardships were laid upon the consciences of those who could not approve of every thing in the church. Suspension from preaching, and deprivation of benefices, was deemed an insufficient punishment for the sin of nonconformity. The scrupulous puritans received the terrible sentence of excommunication; they were expelled from the public congregation, rendered incapable of suing for their lawful debts, imprisoned for life, denied Christian burial, and, as far as possible, ex-

cluded from the kingdom of heaven ! These horrid canons, at which human nature shudders, are still in force, though the church dares not, and cannot execute them. Dr. Bancroft, being preferred to the see of Canterbury, and placed at the head of ecclesiastical affairs, enforced the observance of these superstitions, and proceeded with great severity against those who refused subjection to these overwhelming encroachments on conscience.

This archbishop is styled, “ a sturdy piece,” and is said to have proceeded with “ rigour, severity, and wrath,” against the puritans.* His unrelenting strictness gave a new face to religion. The neglected ceremonies were strictly enforced, and canonical subscription was universally required : so that there was no room left, or allowance made, for scruples of conscience or difference of opinion.† By these intolerant proceedings several hundred ministers were suspended and deprived ; some of whom were excommunicated and cast into prison ; while others, to preserve their consciences, were driven into banishment.

The high commission, with Bancroft at its head, now swelled into a monstrous grievance, of which many heavy complaints were made in the parliament. Every man, it is said, must now conform to the episcopal church, and give up his opinions, or relinquish his rights and safety. That court was the touch-stone, to try whether men were current ; and if they were not sufficiently soft to receive such impressions as were attempted to be made upon them, they were there beaten out, or they could not pass. “ This,” adds the learned prelate, “ was the beginning of that mischief, which, when it was fully ripe, made such a bloody tincture in both kingdoms, as will never be got out of the bishops’ lawn sleeves.”‡

As Bancroft was the first man who defended the divine right of episcopacy ; so he took a distinguished part in the attempts to raise the prerogative above law, by advising the king to make the redress of grievances dependant entirely on his own sovereign pleasure. To this end he presented to the king and council, “ articles of abuses which were desired to

* Bp. Kennet, vol. ii. p. 665.

† Collier, vol. ii. p. 687.

‡ Bp. Kennet, vol. ii. p. 682.

be reformed in granting prohibitions." Hence, being a most zealous asserter of the prerogative, he laboured to inspire the king with a resolution of making himself absolute, to which his majesty was naturally too much inclined. Nay, he had already declared to the commons, that he was absolute: an epithet, we may imagine, not very grateful to English ears, but one to which they had been accustomed from the mouth of Elizabeth.

The arbitrary notions of the king, were greatly promoted by the excessive flattery of the clergy. If the doctrine of unlimited passive obedience did not originate with them, they had the sole honour of having cherished and brought it to perfection. They preached this odious doctrine in the ears of king James, to render the puritans more obnoxious in his eyes. The tolerant doctrines of the contrary party were extremely offensive to the ruling clergy, who dreaded them more than those of the papists. The bishops, therefore, represented those doctrines as destructive to monarchy, no less than to the government of the episcopal church; a charge notoriously contrary to truth, but particularly calculated to kindle in his breast the most inflammatory indignation.

Amidst all that court flattery with which the king was continually surrounded, some of his council were honest enough to tell him, that the redress of grievances was the proper business of the parliament; and that in case he granted the archbishop's request, he would plunge himself into almost inextricable difficulties. Notwithstanding the king's desires to exalt the prerogative, he took time for cool reflection upon the archbishop's advice, and ordered the prelate's articles to be laid before the judges. The venerable judges were unanimously of opinion, that the king could not decide upon these articles; and this opinion, signed by the whole bench, was delivered to the council. The archbishop's project was, therefore, totally defeated.

Though the opinion of the judges was as just as it was honourable to their official character; yet their opinion upon another occasion was flagrantly erroneous, and even destructive of the very constitution. The king, to countenance and support the archiepiscopal proceedings, ordered the twelve judges to attend in the star-chamber, when he proposed to

them several important questions, requiring their answers. One of these questions was, "whether it be an offence punishable, and what punishment was due to it, when persons framed petitions, and collected to them a multitude of hands, to present to the king in a public cause; as the puritans had done, with an intimation to him, that if he denied their suit, many thousands of his subjects would be discontented?" In answer to this important question, the judges declared, that the offence here stated was fineable at *discretion*, and approached very near to *treason* and *felony*; and to this opinion all the lords of the council agreed! Thus, by the determination of all the judges of England, all the clergy were excluded from the protection of the laws; the king without parliament might make what ecclesiastical constitutions he pleased; the high commissioners, who were his majesty's delegates, might proceed upon these constitutions *ex officio*, without the forms of law; and the subjects might not open their complaints to the king, nor petition for relief, without being fineable at pleasure, and made liable to punishments nearly equal to those inflicted for treason and felony! Britain could not help weeping when men of such principles were the guardians of her laws. This was making the king absolute in all ecclesiastical affairs, without the possibility of redress; and was most probably intended to make him also absolute in the state.*

Whatever might be the design of consulting the judges, the archbishop resumed fresh confidence upon their determination, and pursued the scrupulous puritans with great rigour. The whole of the London clergy were summoned to Lambeth, to subscribe to Whitgift's three articles according to the late canons: but so many refused to appear, or to subscribe in explicit terms, that the churches were in danger of being again shut up for want of preachers. This so alarmed the court, which had been told the number of nonconformists was considerable, that the bishops found it necessary for a time, to relax the rigours of canonical subscription, and to accept of a promise only to use certain trivial ceremonies, with the Common-prayer: nay, in this extremity they were forced in some instances to accept a concession that they might be used, without even a promise of compliance in future.†

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 487—490.

† Ibid.

The prelates of the high-party presently renewed their courage. The poor puritan ministers were *ferreted out in all corners*; some were suspended, others deprived of their livings, and lecturers silenced.* These rigorous proceedings drove great numbers to Holland, and even to the inhospitable wilderness of Virginia, where, among wild Pagans, they enjoyed with undisturbed repose the blessing of unrestricted religious liberty. Some having departed for the new settlement, and the archbishop finding many more ready for the voyage, obtained his majesty's proclamation, forbidding them without the king's license. The arbitrary court was apprehensive that the zealous patrons of truth, and of the rights of conscience, would in the end become too numerous and powerful in the wilderness of America.† They must, therefore, neither enjoy liberty of conscience in a protestant country at home, nor be suffered to enjoy that privilege among untutored heathens in a foreign land.

Notwithstanding these glaring instances of intolerance and inhumanity, to do justice to the character of king James, it will be necessary to inform the reader, that he afforded secure protection to the foreign protestants, who had fled from the rage of persecution in their own country, and sought an asylum in England. The members of the Dutch church in London having presented their address to his majesty, he was graciously pleased to return this favourable answer:—"I need not use many words to declare my good will towards you, who have taken refuge here for the sake of religion. Had opportunity offered when I lived at a great distance, and, as it were, in a corner of the world, I had given you some token of my good affection towards you. But, since it has pleased God to make me king of this country, I swear to you, that if any one shall give you disturbance in your churches, upon your application to me, I will revenge your cause. Although you be none of my proper subjects, yet I will maintain and cherish you, as much as any prince in the world."‡

James was willing to allow foreign presbyterians a free toleration, and resolved to afford them every possible protection

* Winwood, vol. ii. p. 48.

† Rapin, vol. ii. p. 176.

‡ Strype, vol. iv. p. 386, 387.

in the enjoyment of this privilege.* The only persons to whom he refused this favour, were his own natural born protestant subjects ! He discovered a strong propensity to afford a toleration to the Roman catholics, who were incessantly conspiring against his crown and life ; yet all the considerations that could be suggested were insufficient to soften his mind so as to extend the least degree of lenity towards protestant nonconformists, who were the best friends of the civil constitution, and his majesty's most loyal and obedient subjects. Nay, instead of exercising lenity towards them, and affording them unrestricted religious liberty, as their just, and legal, and undeniable birthright, he urged and assisted the bishops to oppress and persecute them in every part of his dominions.

On his majesty's accession, the catholics expected such kind of toleration as would enable them to practise, and eventually to restore their religion. His majesty's speech to the parliament, however, convinced them that his intention was to divide their interests, by a toleration of those who would renounce the pope's supremacy, and the expulsion out of the kingdom of those who refused. Hence it is generally supposed, arose the horrid gunpowder plot in the year 1605, too well known to require any recital. Upon the assembly of the parliament, four days after this plot was to have been executed, the king made a long and wordy speech, in which he took great pains to acquit the catholic religion, ascribing the plot to those papists who allowed the pope's authority to depose and destroy princes. The greatest part of his majesty's subjects beheld, with grief and astonishment, the tender regard which he expressed for the catholics in general, under colour of a useless, if not an imaginary distinction ; and they could not help observing his tenderness for the religion of Rome, and his antipathy against that of the oppressed puritans. The former, in his opinion, did not hinder its professors from being faithful subjects ; but the latter, he deemed unworthy of a toleration in any well governed commonwealth. While he called the doctrine of transubstantiation a mere *school question*, his indignation against the puritanical opinions arose to

* Collier, vol. ii. p. 705.

so high a pitch, that, although they were represented as pertaining to things indifferent, and had no relation to matters of state, he, with great absurdity, stigmatized them as *worthy of the fire*.^{*} James, “from this time to the day of his death, continued always writing and talking against popery, but acting for it!”[†]

The Roman pontiff having prohibited the English catholics from taking the oath of allegiance to the king, under pain of eternal damnation, his majesty published an apology in his own defence, with a preamble addressed to all Christian princes; in which, after acquitting himself from the charge of persecuting the catholics, he reproached his holiness with ingratitude—“considering the free liberty of religion he had granted them, the honours he had conferred upon them, the free access they had at all times to his person, the general jail delivery of all convicted Jesuits and papists, and the strict orders that he had given his judges not to put the laws in execution against them.” His majesty in all this said nothing more than the truth; but, surely, an apology was necessary to his own protestant subjects, for superseding the execution of the laws of the realm; especially as many of his best protestant subjects, merely for their conscientious scruples, were fined, imprisoned, or banished from their country.[‡]

The archbishop, finding the king's prerogative and arbitrary government gaining ground, was determined to make another effort concerning prohibitions. He once more offered his articles to the king and council: but the judges, who were again consulted, proved as decisive and resolute as before; so that the attempt was finally relinquished. Bancroft's system was to have made the will of the king the law of England. Accordingly his vicar-general at this juncture published a book, which his majesty licensed, containing these extraordinary propositions:—“That the king is not bound by the laws, or his coronation oath.—That he is not obliged to call a parliament to make laws, but may do it by his own absolute power.—That it is a great favour to admit the consent of the subjects in giving subsidies.”

^{*} Rapin, vol ii. p. 172.

[†] Burnet, vol. i. p. 12.

[‡] Fuller, b. x. p. 101.—Warner, vol. ii. p. 491—493.

The king's behaviour now grew every day more and more displeasing to the people. The regard which he showed to the Roman catholics, whose cause he espoused on all occasions, and whom he promoted to the most important offices of state, created fears and jealousies that there was some secret conspiracy against the protestant reformation.* His arbitrary encroachments made him always particularly tenacious of his prerogative. He would not suffer it to be contested by any of his subjects; and when the learned judges of the realm attempted to set boundaries to it, he severely reprimanded them, contemning their determinations. He would not so much as suffer his endeared prerogative to be argued, and professed himself to be sole judge of the extent of his own authority. So it was too evident that he intended to rule with an absolute power.

He had already unfolded to the parliament his high pretensions; but he now openly declared to the two houses, that the power of kings was like the Divine power: "for, as God can create and destroy, make and unmake at his pleasure, so kings can give life and death, judge all, and be judged by none." He told them, "that it was blasphemy to dispute what God may do; so it was sedition in subjects to dispute what a king might do, in the height of his power. He, therefore, commanded them, not to meddle with the main points of government, which would lessen his *craft*, who had been thirty years at his trade in Scotland, and served an apprenticeship of seven years in England.† This was degrading language from "the Solomon of the age," to the lords and commons of England, betraying an ill acquaintance with the nature and ends of civil government.

Archbishop Bancroft was a crafty prelate, and ever devising measures for extending the royal prerogative, and upholding the political church. Whilst he oppressed and persecuted multitudes of pious Christians without mercy, he presented his fervent petition for the pardon and release of a notorious robber, under just condemnation.‡ He procured the king's patent to found a college at Chelsea, for the maintenance of a certain number of able controvertists, to combat, in their ser-

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 494. † Rapin, vol. ii. p. 190.—Kennet, vol. ii. p. 682.

‡ Lansdowne's MSS. vol. clix. no. 291.

mons and writings, all the adversaries of the church of England; but his death put an end to the project. Dr. George Abbot, a man of a very different spirit, and much less severe in his principles, succeeded him in the chair of Canterbury. Abbot could not be prevailed upon to engage furiously in the work of persecution, nor, to the honour of his character, would he blindly follow all the maxims of the court, in the government of the church.*

The pernicious consequences which result from making kings and bishops lords of conscience, were awfully exemplified in this reign. An uninspired king, who was Head of the church, and Defender of the Faith, had formerly been the terror of his subjects, and he would not suffer what he called heresy to go unpunished. King James was in this respect placed in a situation exactly similar to that of Henry VIII. The revival of the burning system, therefore, was thought equally necessary in this, as in any former reign. The bishops of London and of Lichfield having discovered two heretics in their dioceses, Bartholomew Legate, and Edward Wightman, would have been deficient in episcopal zeal had they suffered them to pass without censure. The two poor men were, therefore, cited into the ecclesiastical courts, where they were condemned to be burnt alive for refusing to be of the same faith as the bishops, and being transferred to the secular power, as in such cases was provided, one of them lighted up the fires of Smithfield, and the other died in the flames at Lichfield. The names of these right reverend judges of heresy, were Dr. John King, successor of Bonner and Aylmer in the see of London; and Dr. Richard Neile, whose laborious attention to his episcopal duties allowed him time to preach only one sermon in the course of twelve years, during his episcopal exaltation! A third person was at the same time condemned to be burnt for heresy; but the constancy of the two sufferers having awakened the feelings of sympathy and indignation in the breasts of numerous spectators, it was thought most advisable that he should be left to linger out a miserable life in Newgate.†

The execution of these supposed heretics was not only the grossest violation of man's undeniable right to form his own

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 179.

† Fuller, b. x. p. 62—64.

belief, whether that belief agree with, or dissent from, the legislative opinions ; but also proved with the evidence of demonstration, that protestants, as well as papists, could murder men under pretence of religion ; and that the reformation of a few ecclesiastical abuses had not essentially altered the nature and constitution of the hierarchy. Still a political institution, with a tyrant at its head, and a political priesthood for its under guardians, it continued the same antichristian monopoly ;—an usurpation upon the rights of conscience ;—and a declared enemy to the natural liberties of mankind.

King James having shown his princely opposition against heresy, was too much lifted up with success to confine his burning zeal within his own dominions ; but he soon wished to convey the sacred fire into a foreign clime. Conrade Vorstius was chosen to succeed the famous Arminius, as professor of divinity in the university of Leyden ; upon which he published two theological treatises, the one he dedicated to the Landgrave of Hesse, the other to the States of Holland. The king of England being on “ his hunting progress,” met with one of these books ; and having perused it, his royal zeal became inflamed against certain obnoxious opinions maintained by the Dutch theologian. His majesty immediately despatched a letter to his ambassador at the Hague, commanding him to inform the States of Holland, that he was “ infinitely displeased” with the preferment of Vorstius ; that “ the head of such a viper,” instead of promotion, ought to have been trodden and crushed to pieces ; and that if they still persisted in his preferment, he would publish to the world, how much he detested such abominable heresies, with all those who allowed and tolerated them !

His majesty’s zeal, on this occasion, was kindled by the archbishop of Canterbury, as appears from the ambassador’s correspondence, who says—“ The knowledge of Vorstius’s book coming to the notice of our lord of Canterbury, out of his care to preserve religion in its ancient purity and integrity, he hath so far prevailed with his majesty, that from him I have had charge publicly to protest against the reception of Vorstius, which I have done in the assembly of the States General.”* This arrogant behaviour was certainly an open

* Winwood, vol. iii. p. 296.

insult to the States, who had acquitted Vorstius, and chosen him for their professor. To the threats of the English ambassador, the States returned a mild and modest answer, though they had just reason to complain of the haughtiness with which they were treated. James, however, had not patience to wait for his ambassador's reply ; but immediately commanded the fires to be rekindled in his own dominions, and Vorstius's books to be publicly burnt at Paul's cross, and the two universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Vorstius was, nevertheless, still received at Leyden ; at which the king was so much exasperated, that he wrote against him to the States with uncommon vehemence, declaring that "*burning* was *too good* for him !" This unfeeling monarch even threatened, that in case they continued to tolerate their professor, he would cause the churches of England and Scotland to withdraw from the communion of that of Holland, and exhort all other reformed churches to follow their example !

This was carrying matters to a great length. The States of Holland, after receiving many haughty and severe threatenings, thought it would be more for their own interest to yield obedience, though they did this with extreme reluctance, to the outstretched prerogative and ecclesiastical jurisdiction of England, lest it should be followed with more painful consequences.* But why should the officiousness of James interpose with the theological opinions of a foreign State, especially when his advice was never requested ? Why did he employ these haughty threats against a church, over which he could not challenge the least jurisdiction, civil or ecclesiastical ? And why should he employ his extraordinary zeal to preserve the orthodoxy of this foreign *presbyterian* church, when he was harassing and persecuting his own orthodox *presbyterian* subjects ? The Hollanders had unquestionably as great a right to choose a theological professor for their own university, without the least interference of a foreign monarch ; as king James had to choose a religion for all his subjects, and compel them to embrace the whole and every part of his divinity.

Although his majesty exercised such wanton power over learned protestants, at home and abroad, he sought to obtain

* Kennet, vol. ii. p. 715—717.—Rapin, vol. ii. p. 180.

a toleration of Roman catholics within his own dominions. Having agreed to the general articles of his son's marriage with the Infanta of Spain, he drew up a number of private articles favourable to popery, and swore to the observance of them. They were as follows:—"That particular laws made against Roman catholics, shall not at any time hereafter, by any means whatsoever, directly or indirectly, be commanded to be put in execution against them.—That no other laws shall hereafter be made against the said Roman catholics, but that there shall be a *perpetual toleration* of the Roman catholic religion within private houses throughout all our realms and dominions, which we will have to be understood, as well of our kingdom of Scotland and Ireland, as of England; which shall be granted them in manner and form as is decreed in the treaty of marriage.—That we will not by any means persuade the most renowned lady Infanta ever to renounce her religion.—That we will interpose our authority, and use our utmost influence, that the parliament may approve, confirm and ratify all these articles in favour of the Roman catholics; capitulated between the most renowned kings by reason of this marriage; and that the said parliament shall revoke and abrogate all those laws made against the said Roman catholics."*

In exact conformity to this sacred pledge, his majesty exercised the greatest lenity towards the catholics, and sent an order to all the judges, "that in their several circuits, they should discharge all prisoners for ecclesiastical recusancy, for refusing the oath of supremacy, for dispersing popish books, for hearing and saying mass, or for any other point of recusancy which only concerned religion."† The consequence of this order soon became manifest; great numbers of Jesuits and other missionaries flocked to England; the mass was openly celebrated in the country; and in London the popish assemblies were greatly crowded. Had the States of Holland been disposed to return the compliment upon England, and, with a haughty tone, threatened king James and his subjects if he did not immediately suppress popery in his dominions; how

* Prynne's Introduc. p. 44—48.—Rushworth, vol. i. p. 89.

† Ibid. p. 62, 63.—Warner, vol. ii. p. 502.

far would he have felt pleased and gratified with such despotic retaliation? James certainly had no more right, or even the pretension of right, to threaten the Hollanders for choosing and supporting their own theological professor, than they had to threaten him for promoting popery throughout his dominions.

It was generally supposed to be his majesty's intention to grant a full toleration to the catholics, and there was certainly good ground for the supposition. For, besides what has been related above, archbishop Abbot, who could be no stranger to these things, evidently concluded that this was undoubtedly his majesty's intention, and wrote a letter to him with a view to dissuade him from his purpose, thus addressing him;—"I beseech you, Sir, to take into consideration what this toleration is—next what the consequence may be. By this toleration you labour to set up that most damnable and heretical doctrine of the church of Rome, the Whore of Babylon. How hateful will it be to God, how grievous to your good subjects, and the true professors of the Gospel; that your majesty, who hath often disputed, and learnedly written against those wicked heresies, should now show yourself a patron of those doctrines, which your pen hath told the world, and your conscience tells yourself, are superstitious, idolatrous, and detestable! This toleration which you endeavour to set up by proclamation, cannot be done without a parliament; unless your majesty will let your subjects see, that you will take to yourself a liberty to throw down the laws of the land at your pleasure. What dreadful consequences these may draw after them, I beseech your majesty to consider."* No liberal mind will object to the toleration of catholics; but every Englishman will object to the subversion of our laws.

These transactions contain indisputable evidence, that his majesty was grasping at arbitrary power, and that he was resolved to carry the royal prerogative to a point not inferior to any of his royal ancestors. The king might have enjoyed uninterrupted tranquillity, had not the fear of attacks on his admired prerogative continually disturbed his repose. In vain did he on all occasions preach and advance his principles; for he had the misfortune to be regarded by none, except his

* Fuller, b. x. p. 106.

courtiers and immediate dependants. He durst not call a parliament for many years, knowing that the house of commons did not allow of his maxims; but he had the vanity to expect that he should at length convince them of the truth of his principles. Hence in a long speech in the star-chamber, on pretence of making known his design to correct certain abuses, he took for his text the words of the Psalmist: "Give thy judgments to the king, O God, and thy righteousness to the king's Son." After the introduction of his text, he said—"Kings sit in the throne of God, and thence all judgment is derived from the king to the magistrates. In this manner all Christian kings govern, whereby appears the near conjunction between God and the king upward, and the king and the judges downward: the king is to settle the law of God, and his judges to interpret the law of the king." He then instructed his judges in the administration of justice, and prescribed the limits for them, saying—"Encroach not on the prerogative; and deal not in difficult questions, before you consult the king and council, for fear of wounding the king through the sides of a private person. That which concerns the mystery of the king's power, is not lawful to be disputed; for that is to wade into the weakness of princes, and to take away the *mystical reverence* that belongs to those who sit in the *throne of God*!!"*

These were high notions for any mortal to assume. James discovered on this occasion no inconsiderable share of "king-craft." He carried his ecclesiastical authority into his native country, which he loudly proclaimed north of the Tweed. Addressing the parliament of Scotland, he said—"I am not against the advice of grave and learned ministers; but to be over-ruled; as in your former general assemblies, I will not agree: the bishops must rule the ministers, and the king govern both, in matters not repugnant to God's law." The king having appointed three commissioners, his own creatures, to examine and settle the affairs of the church in that country, they immediately adopted this fundamental article, which the king himself, had dictated.—That, whatsoever his majesty shall determine in the external government of the church,

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 192.

with the advice of the archbishops, bishops, and a competent number of the ministry, shall have *the strength of a law*." This, therefore, made the will of the king, the rule of government to the church of Scotland. His majesty moreover said—"The errand for which I have called you, is to know your reasons, why this power ought not to be admitted. I mean not to do any thing against reason: and on the other part, my demands being just and religious, you must not think that I will be refused or resisted. This is a power innate, and a special prerogative which we that are Christian kings have, to order and dispose of external things in the policy of the church, as we by advice of our bishops shall find most fitting."* Thus, king James directed all his authority to bring his mother-kirk, which he had before declared "the purest kirk in the world," to adopt what he had called "an evil-said mass in English," "the English mass-book," and "the badges of popery." But while, with glaring absurdity, he attempted to drill all the people of Scotland to the adoption of the episcopal church and worship, it was discovered, says Burnet, "that he was either inclined to turn papist, or to be of no religion!"†

The bishops, at the same time, made themselves the tools of this despotism, by the administration of the court of high commission now erected by the king in each of the provinces of Scotland. A number of the bishops, with some of the most distinguished of the laity, were constituted members of these courts, five of whom were declared competent to act, provided one of the five was an archbishop. They were authorized to call summarily before them all persons being offenders, either in life or religion, whom they held to be any way scandalous, and proceed to their trial; and if they found them impenitent, to issue a mandate to their pastors, under whose ministry they lived, to pronounce against them the sentence of excommunication. If the pastors refused to comply, the court was empowered to proceed against them by suspension, deposition, or imprisonment. They were also empowered to fine at their discretion, such persons as had been dragged to their bar, and as appeared to them to be guilty. A warrant of the commis-

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 194.

† Burnet's Times, vol. i. p. 7.

sioners, signed by the archbishop, was sufficient for all jailers to bury in dungeons the unhappy persons who fell under the displeasure of this protestant Inquisition. In cases of contumacy, the privy-council were commanded to employ the whole force of the government in executing the sentences pronounced by the court of high commission; and if the persons summoned did not obey the order of the council, they were denounced as rebels, and subjected to all the weight of punishment inflicted upon the enemies of the state. It might have appeared, even to the abettors of persecution, that the clauses already specified gave a sufficient range for the exercise of their high powers; but the king further authorized the commissioners to watch the conduct and conversation of all ministers, preachers, teachers in schools, colleges, or universities, and to proceed against those who used what were termed "impertinent speeches;" in other words, a system of jealous inspection was established, which destroyed all confidence amongst men, and annihilated the happiness derived from the intercourse of society.

The prelates, viewed at once as apostates and instruments of such tyranny, were held in abhorrence. All the odium of the high commission fell upon them. James having raised them to rank and power, thought he might, by their assistance, be able to subvert the presbyterian polity; therefore he issued an edict, the language and spirit of which could not fail to rouse the virtuous indignation of all who valued the best interests of men. This oppressive measure, supported by such high authority, established the horrors of a protestant Inquisition, converted the inhabitants of Scotland into spies upon the virtuous feelings of one another, and sanctioned a mode of criminal procedure which could be tolerated only under the depression of the worst tyranny. For the slightest opposition to a long series of propositions, at variance with what the king, as well as the people, had sworn to maintain, every man was liable to be immured in a dungeon; he might be seized wherever the villany of his persecutors led them to search for him, even in his own house, and in the bosom of his family, and be deprived of his liberty, not till he established his innocence, or demanded a trial, but till the lords of the council, the men who were capable of framing and pub-

lishing such a proclamation, found leisure, or inclination to intimate what they wished to be done with him. "Could that cause," my author adds, "be acceptable to the nation which needed support like this? Could any thing be more calculated to inspire detestation of episcopacy, and of every thing connected with it, than associating that form of ecclesiastical government with a degree of oppression, which, if long endured, eradicates the best feelings, and sinks into the profligacy and degradation of slavery? Yet, because our ancestors were not willing to bow their necks to this iron yoke, they have been represented as unreasonable and seditious enthusiasts."*

Great opposition, as might be expected, was made against these despotic measures. The bishops themselves, says Burnet, performed their part very ill. They generally grew haughty, neglected their functions, lived chiefly at court, and lost all esteem with the people. Some few, who were stricter and more learned, leaned so grossly to popery, that the heat and violence of the reformation became the principal subject of their sermons. King James, at length, grew weary of this opposition, or was so far apprehensive of the ill effect it might have, that, through sloth or fear, and the great disorder into which his ill conduct brought his affairs, he relinquished his designs in Scotland.†

On this occasion, the king and his servants the prelates, developed their true character, and openly declared the oppressive principles on which they directed their proceedings. His majesty set up his own sovereign will as the ecclesiastical law to be observed throughout his dominions; and while he absolutely refused all control, he considered all power and authority as dwelling in himself alone, to coerce his subjects in religious matters. Hence he afterwards reminded his two houses of parliament at Westminster, that the laws of religion consisted of two important branches, "persuasion and compulsion," and that compulsion was "to bind the conscience." None of his predecessors had shown a greater propensity to encroach on the natural rights of the people, and to make himself absolute; nevertheless, he had the ignorance or teme-

* Cook's Church of Scotland, vol. ii. p. 223, 243. † Burnet, vol. i. p. 10.

city to affirm, in his speech to the parliament, concerning the Spanish match—"If it shall not prove a furtherance to religion, I am not worthy to be your king. I will never proceed but to the glory of God, and the content of my subjects!"*

As the king was sunk into voluptuous indolence, his court became an open scene of riot and profaneness. Those who made any pretensions to personal religion and conscientious practice, were branded with the name of puritans; and as these continued to grow out of favour, papists and open profligates were publicly caressed. His majesty returning from his tour to Scotland, was grieved to see his English subjects so much addicted to the puritanic sin of keeping the Sabbath too strictly; therefore, to encourage and promote through the kingdom the religion of the court, his majesty published the "Book of Sports," to instruct the people with what amusements they might lawfully entertain themselves on the Lord's day, though he had before ratified the articles of the church of Ireland, in which the *morality* of the Sabbath was asserted. In this affair his majesty's conscience was under the direction of his prelates, by whose sage and Christian advice the measure was adopted. This royal declaration for Sunday sports was drawn up by bishop Morton, and recommends dancing, archery, leaping, vaulting, may-games, whitsun ales, morrice dances, setting up of may-poles, and "other sports therewith used."† All ministers were commanded to sanction this stimulus to licentiousness, by reading it in their public congregations; and those who refused to comply with the profane mandate, were prosecuted in the high commission, suspended, and imprisoned. This impolitic encouragement of profaneness gave great offence to many pious and conscientious persons, and was one occasion of the dreadful calamities in the following reign.‡ It was intended, says bishop Kennet, as a trap to catch men of tender consciences, whom they could not otherwise ensnare; and as a means of promoting the ease, wealth, and magnificence of the bishops: but it made the very stones in the walls of their palaces cry aloud against them!§

This profane encroachment upon the Lord's day gave fresh

* Bp. Kennet, vol. ii. p. 730. † Fuller, b. x. p. 74. ‡ Echard, p. 393.
§ Bp. Kennet, vol. ii. p. 709.

liberty to the king and the people in the practice of almost every abomination; and it proved as an open flood-gate to every kind of debauchery and wickedness. That which presently followed was certainly not much better. To put an effectual stop to the diffusion of light, and truth, and liberal principles, and to constrain the nation by progressive steps to retrace its former barbarism, the king gave his sage directions to the clergy of his church, the following brief abstract of which will, no doubt, afford the reader some gratification:

That no preacher, under a bishop or dean, shall expound any text of Scripture, or make a set discourse, not agreeable to the thirty-nine articles or the homilies of the church of England.—That no parson, vicar, curate, or lecturer, shall hereafter preach any sermon, on Sundays or holydays in the *afternoon*, funeral sermons alone excepted; and that those preachers be most approved and encouraged, who spend the afternoon in catechising the children.—That no preacher, under a bishop or dean, shall presume to preach in any popular auditory on the deep points of predestination, election, reprobation; or on the universality, efficacy, resistibility, or irresistibility of God's grace: as being fitter for schools than public auditories.—That no preacher of any degree whatsoever shall henceforth presume in any auditory to declare, limit, or set bounds to the prerogative, power, or jurisdiction of sovereign princes.—And that those who shall transgress any one of these injunctions, shall be suspended from their office and benefit for a year and a day, until his majesty, by advice of the next convocation, shall prescribe some further punishment.*

The whole of this royal artillery was directed against the doctrines and practice of the scrupulous puritans. The king had lately discovered his zeal and madness in defence of these doctrines in a foreign land, but now positively forbade them being propagated in England. The thirty-nine articles were established by the statute law of the realm; yet no one under a bishop or dean must be allowed to preach on the seventeenth, concerning predestination and election. The second injunction allows of their catechising children, and of their expounding the catechism; yet, according to a learned church-

* Collier, vol. ii. p. 723.

man, the bishops' officials were so active, that, in many places, they tied up preachers in the afternoon to the very letter of the catechism, allowing them no liberty to expound or enlarge upon the answers.*

The suppression of afternoon sermons was an unwarrantable and antichristian infringement on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, on the unalienable rights of Christians, and on the indispensable duties and obligations of ministers. No fact could be more obvious, than that the people never stood in greater need of the frequent and faithful preaching of the Gospel; or that the puritan ministers were incessantly laborious in their ministerial function; yet, by these antichristian injunctions, all afternoon sermons, except at funerals, were at once cut off from the church of God! This was the worst kind of despotism: and when considered in connexion with the encouragement of profane sports on the Lord's day, it could scarcely be surpassed by all the iniquities of Rome. James might, therefore, have challenged all who had sat in St. Peter's chair, to have produced more vigorous attempts for the exaltation of themselves, and the subversion of Christianity. The king and the prelates, by these disgraceful proceedings, not only prevented the ministers from feeding their flocks and fulfilling their obligations to Christ, and robbed the people of the food of their souls; but they were guilty of the most flagrant usurpation on the authority of God, who commanded his servants without restriction or limitation, to "go into *all the world*, and preach the Gospel to *every creature*."

Although king James discovered a prevailing propensity to favour his Roman catholic subjects, and gradually abated the rigour of those laws which had been enacted against them; yet he is said to have banished great numbers, and to have signed warrants for hanging and quartering *twenty-five*, wholly on account of their religion.† And on a review of the statutes passed during this reign, it is doubtful whether their condition was in any degree meliorated. These laws, it is true, do not extend the penalties of high treason, as did those of his predecessor, to the profession of the catholic faith: they were more careful of life, but perhaps less tenacious of pro-

* Fuller, b. x. p. 111.

† End of Controversy, part iii. p. 183.

perty. The parliament, throughout this reign, betrayed a spirit of hostility against the catholics, as determined as it was unchristian and revengeful. "Tie up all recusants; let condemned Jesuits and seminaries be hanged; let those not condemned be judged; no band can hold them but imprisonment, banishment, or death," was the reiterated language of the legislative assembly, which was, nevertheless, constantly exclaiming against the tyrannical intolerance of the bishops and their ecclesiastical courts, which, under the sanction of unjust and impolitic laws, they arbitrarily exercised over the consciences of the people.*

SECTION II.

The Failure of Efforts to obtain greater Liberty of Worship.

KING James's behaviour in Scotland, previous to his accession to the English crown, had raised the hopes of the friends of liberty and a purer reformation. They placed too much dependence upon his puritanical education, his subscribing the covenant, his repeated declarations, his avowed sympathy and kindness to the suffering nonconformists. On these grounds their expectations were highly raised; and, upon his accession, their prospects seemed to brighten; they accordingly took fresh courage, omitted those things in the public service which were offensive to their consciences, laid aside the surplice, and rejected the unprofitable ceremonies. Their prospects were, however, presently blasted; and they, together with the whole nation, were soon involved in more grievous bondage than ever.

Some supposed that towards the close of the reign of Elizabeth, the zealous patrons of Christian freedom were totally vanquished, and their number greatly diminished, by the rigorous execution of the penal laws. This however was contrary to fact. For in the beginning of this reign, there were, upon a moderate calculation, at least fourteen or fifteen hundred ministers, who groaned under the corruptions of the national church, and earnestly sought a reformation of existing

* Brown's Laws, p. 69. Notes, p. 41.

abuses; therefore, during his majesty's progress to London, they presented him with their "Millenary Petition," subscribed by upwards of one thousand pious and able ministers, seven hundred and fifty of whom were out of twenty-five counties.* In this important document, they addressed his majesty in the following very modest and becoming language:

"Most gracious and dread sovereign. Seeing it hath pleased the Divine Majesty, to the great comfort of all good Christians, to advance your highness, according to your just title, to the peaceable government of this church and commonwealth of England: We, the ministers of the Gospel in this land, neither as factious men affecting a popularity in the church, nor as schismatics aiming at the dissolution of the state ecclesiastical; but as the faithful servants of Christ, and loyal subjects to your majesty, desiring and longing for the redress of divers abuses of the church; could do no less in our obedience to God, our service to your majesty, and our love to the church, than acquaint your princely majesty with our particular griefs: as your princely pen writeth; 'The King, as a good physician, must first know what peccant humours his patient is most subject to, before he can attempt a cure.' Although divers of us who sue for reformation have formerly in respect to the times subscribed to the Book; some upon protestation, some upon exposition given them, some with condition, rather than the church should have been deprived of their labour and ministry; yet now we, to the number of more than a thousand of your majesty's subjects and ministers, all groaning as under a common burden of human rites and ceremonies, do with one joint consent humble ourselves at your majesty's feet, to be eased and relieved in this behalf."

After this preamble to their petition, they enumerate the grievances which they wished to see redressed, and then add—"These, with other abuses remaining and practised in the church of England, we are able to show not to be agreeable to the Scriptures, if it shall please your majesty further to hear us, or more at large by writing or by conference among learned men. Yet we doubt not but that, without any further process, your majesty (of whose Christian judgment we have

* Clark's Lives annexed to Martyr. p. 116.

received so good a taste already) is able of yourself to judge of the equity of this cause. We trust God hath appointed your highness to be our physician to heal these diseases. We say with Mordecai to Esther, ‘ Who knoweth whether you are come to the kingdom for such a time ? ’ Thus your majesty will do that which we are persuaded will be acceptable to God, honourable to your majesty in all succeeding ages, profitable to his church, which will be thereby increased, comfortable to your ministers, who shall be no more suspended, silenced, disgraced, or imprisoned for the traditions of men ; and be prejudicial to none but those who seek their own ease, credit, and profit in the world. Thus with all dutiful submission, referring ourselves to your majesty’s pleasure, for your gracious answer as God shall direct you ; we most humbly commend your highness to the Divine Majesty, whom we beseech for Christ’s sake to dispose your royal heart to do herein, that, which will be to his glory, to the good of his church, and to your endless comfort.—Your majesty’s most humble subjects, the ministers of the Gospel, who desire not a disorderly innovation, but a due and godly reformation.”*

Many other petitions were presented to his majesty from the various counties through which he passed. Though the millenary petition did not propose that entire reformation, and the restoration of that perfect liberty, which is the birthright of man ; yet, had the solicitations of the petitioners been granted, the church of England would certainly have attained to a greater degree of purity, and approached considerably nearer the apostolic institutions, while the existing burdens and abuses would have considerably diminished. This would have been a great benefit to society, and might have paved the way for a total abolition of all human traditions and impositions in the worship of God, and for a complete and permanent emancipation from ecclesiastical slavery ; but the king, instead of listening to their cries and groans, or attending to the justice of their cause, threatened them with vassallage still more grievous.

The millenary petition, as might have been expected, alarmed the two universities, and they expressed in various ways

* Fuller, b. x. p. 22, 23.

their warmest resentment against it. In a congregation called for this purpose at Cambridge, it was resolved, "that whosoever shall oppose by word or writing, the doctrine or discipline of the church of England, or any part thereof, shall, *ipso facto*, be suspended from any degree already taken, and be disabled from taking any degree in future!" The university of Oxford, at the same time, published an answer to the petition, signifying that they were invited to it by the commendable example of their reverend brethren at Cambridge. This answer was dedicated to the archbishop of Canterbury, the chancellors of Oxford and Cambridge, the two secretaries of state, and the lords of the council; whom they prayed to inform his majesty of their laudable and zealous efforts in defence of the church: "Humbly beseeching his most excellent majesty to consider how inconvenient and insufferable it was to *permit* a long and well-settled government to be *so much as questioned*, and much more to be *altered*; especially, considering the matter which is pretended to be the cause of their griefs, and of their desired reformation *unjustly* so called."*

The archbishop and his brethren were indefatigable, in recommending the church to his majesty's care and protection; which they represented as approaching very near to the primitive church, and as the best suited to a monarchical government. They misrepresented the puritans as turbulent and factious, as inconsiderable in number and aiming at the subversion of church and state. Notwithstanding their vigilant use of these political engines to uphold their political church, the old archbishop laboured between hope and despair, and was under some painful apprehensions as to the result. In his letter to the earl of Shrewsbury, he says, "although our humourous and contentious brethren have made many petitions and motions, correspondent to their natures; yet your lordship may perceive by the proclamation published, and, to my comfort, I am assured by his majesty's letters to me, that they have *not much* prevailed. Your lordship, I am sure, doth imagine that I have not all this while been idle, nor *greatly quiet* in mind. For who can promise himself rest among so many *vipers*?"†

The king having warmly espoused the cause of the bishops,

* Strype's Whitgift, p. 567.

† Ibid. p. 570, Appen. p. 230.

and shown his determination to persecute all who scrupled ecclesiastical conformity, these melancholy apprehensions were presently removed, and the learned prelates soon revived the scenes of intolerance. Their lordships, however, were not all of one mind. Bishop Vaughan of London was an honourable exception. He is justly styled a “spiritually minded” prelate;* therefore he refused having any share in the disgraceful persecution of his brethren; but, during his occupation of the see of London, he restored many of the suspended pious ministers, allowing them to live peaceably, and to enjoy the liberty of their ministry.

The house of commons discovered the same catholic and friendly disposition to the various classes of protestants. We have already noticed the encroachments of the crown, and the high tone with which king James addressed his two houses of parliament. The commons could not be persuaded by such eloquence, or convinced by such arguments. They immediately poured out their complaints against his encroachment on the privileges of the house, and his attempt to set aside the common law. Their spirit and judgment appeared not merely in defence of their own rights and privileges, but they ventured to consider the prerogative of the crown in matters relating to the church; where they beheld a large province of government usurped by the king alone, and which admitted of no specific boundary. The lower house could not help beholding with grief, that the ecclesiastical canons, though they had never the sanction of parliament, were considered of equal force as the statutes of the realm. They therefore passed a bill against the establishment of ecclesiastical canons without consent of parliament; but when it was transferred to the upper house, where the spiritual lords had such vast power and influence, it was presently rejected. This made no alteration in their opinions; it tended only to deepen their convictions. They complained loudly against the oppressive proceedings of the spiritual courts, in depriving, disgracing, and imprisoning pious and faithful clergymen, for not extending their subscription farther than the statute law required. They also complained of the disgraceful severities of the high commis-

* Fuller, b. x. p. 49.

sion court, and the oath *ex officio*, as hateful, arbitrary, and illegal; and that those who would not acknowledge the king's authority to be as extensive as his flatterers were pleased to make it, were branded with the name of puritans, and considered as enemies to both church and state.

The parliament presented, at this time, their humble petition to the king, in which they say, "that divers painful and learned pastors, who have long travailed in the work of the ministry, with good fruit and blessing on their labours, who were ready to subscribe to the true Christian faith and doctrine of sacraments; for not conforming in some points of ceremony, and refusing the subscription directed by the late canons, have been removed from their ecclesiastical livings, being their freeholds, and debarred from all means of maintenance, to the great grief of sundry of your majesty's well-affected subjects." And in a memorable speech during this parliament, it was said, "that the depriving, degrading, and imprisoning learned and godly ministers, whom God hath furnished with most heavenly graces, is the crying sin of the land, most provoking to God, and most grievous to the subjects."* In addition, therefore, to the bill against canonical subscription, there was introduced another bill against pluralities and nonresidence, a third against scandalous ministers, a fourth against the oath *ex officio*; they all passed the commons, but were lost in the lords.

The king hearing of all these attacks upon his endeared prerogative, sent for the two houses to Whitehall, and endeavoured to convince them that they complained without cause. At the same time he made them understand, that if he did not rule with an absolute sway, it was not for want of power, but owing entirely to his tenderness and moderation! The unbounded claim served only to deepen their convictions, and show the justice of their complaints; and the commons, not terrified with this high language, still persevered in steadily asserting their rights. They presented him with a remonstrance by twenty of their members; in which they declared, that whereas they at first received a message, and were now by his majesty's speech commanded to refrain from debating

* Calamy's Church, p. 131, 137.

upon things pertaining to the chief points of government, “ they do hold it to be their undoubted right to examine the grievances of the subject, and to inquire into their own rights and properties, as well as his majesty’s prerogative :” and they most humbly and earnestly solicited his majesty, that, without offence, they might, according to the undoubted right and liberty of parliament, proceed in their intended course against the late new impositions. In another petition they recommended, that the clergy, who demeaned themselves peaceably, but were deprived for not subscribing to articles added to the statute law, might be restored to their ministerial employment; that pluralities and nonresidence might be restrained; that the abuse of excommunication for trivial matters might be reformed; and that a law might pass for reducing the high commission court within more reasonable bounds. To this they annexed their reasons to show, not only that the statute which authorized this court had been found inconvenient and dangerous, but also that the commission itself, and the execution of it, were heavy grievances to the nation. But the king, instead of favouring the liberal and just sentiments of the commons, was extremely displeased with their conduct, and dissolved them without passing a single act. He was so much out of humour with the spirit of English liberty which was growing in the two houses, that he resolved, if possible, to govern in future without parliament.*

The lower house having presented their humble petition to the king, for certain alterations and improvements in ecclesiastical matters, the king returned his answer, saying, “ I perceive by your petition, that my last speech unto you about matters of religion hath so little opened your understandings, as that you not only now move me again in those very points which I directly discharged you from meddling with, for the various reasons then alleged by me; but you are even come to that pitch of forgetfulness as to allege my command for your warrant to enter into consultation upon subjects of this nature: whereas I ordained that your consultation upon those points should not be brought into your house. Therefore I can give no other answer to your petition, than by repeating

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 494—496.

those reasons that I formerly alleged, that a settled order in a settled church must either be uniformly obeyed without exception, or dispensing therewith will surely bring confusion to the whole state of the church. For these ceremonies are either indifferent, or against the Scripture. If they be not indifferent, then are all the members of the conformable church of England heretics, and I am the arch-heretic. Whenever any man is able to prove those ceremonies to be contrary to the word of God, then I shall be content to make a public recantation. But if they be indifferent, then can it not be denied, that these painful and profitable ministers prove themselves to be nothing else but seditious schismatics; and therefore my counsel is, that hereafter you meddle only with such things as are within your reach !!”*

The king having freed himself from the incumbrance of the parliament, and resolving never to call another, the courtiers around him greatly applauded his good intentions. An absolute government was much more conducive to their interests, than a government bounded by law; where the conduct of the king, as well as that of his favourites, is amenable to the constitution, and depends in some measure on the views of the people. The whole of the court was over-joyed at his majesty's shaking off the troublesome yoke of parliaments.†

The high commission now exceeded all bounds, and exercised its unlimited inquisition upon his majesty's worthy subjects. Under Elizabeth this court was confined wholly to causes ecclesiastical; but under James, to render it more effectual, and more beneficial to the government, it was extended to matters of state. Since all the commissioners were appointed by the king, and were known to favour his arbitrary notions; their proceedings were extremely gratifying to his prerogative. All persons, therefore, in church and state, who ventured to question his unbounded power, or who could not yield a blind submission to his despotic orders, or defend the rights and liberties of the subject, were prosecuted, and multitudes ruined, in the high commission.‡

These uncatholic proceedings obtained the warmest com-

* Cotton's MSS. Titus, vol. iv. p. 169.

† Rapin, vol. ii. p. 179.

‡ Ibid. p. 177.

mendation and applause of the court party. At the same time, Sir Richard Knightley, Sir Valentine Knightley, Sir Edward Montague, and some others, presented a petition to the king, in behalf of the suffering ministers of Northamptonshire ; and, extraordinary as it may appear, for this act of humanity they were convened before his majesty's council, and told, that what they had done " tended to sedition, and was little less than treason !"* A general petitionary address was also presented to the king, entitled, " An Humble Supplication for Toleration and Liberty to enjoy and observe the Ordinances of Jesus Christ in the ministration of his Churches, in lieu of human Constitutions." The petitioners earnestly prayed for liberty to worship God without the traditions and impositions of men, and to reform their own churches according to the rules of Scripture ; but their request was indignantly rejected. This petition was published to the world by those who apprehended the church of England to be fast approaching towards the church of Rome.

By the intolerance of queen Elizabeth and her prelates multitudes of pious Christians had been banished from the country, and forced to seek an asylum in a foreign land. These severities, as we have already stated, fell chiefly upon the Brownists ; who, being driven to Holland, republished their confession of faith, which they dedicated to king James. In this dedication they earnestly sought his majesty's favour, with a toleration of their religious opinions in his dominions, where they wished to spend the remainder of their days as his majesty's good and peaceable subjects, addressing him as follows :

" Forasmuch as many have solicited your majesty with their religious causes, it seemed needful to us also, most gracious sovereign, to publish the cause that we profess, and are persuaded to be the truth of God ; both for the defence of the faith which we witness, and the clearing of ourselves, the Lord's unworthy witnesses, from error, schism, heresy, and the like, imputed to us. True it is, that our mean and contemptible estate, whom God hath allotted to prophesy in sackcloth, and not to speak at home, but from a strange country ;

* Winwood, vol. ii. p. 49.

and most of all, our own unworthiness and insufficiency to manage such a cause, might discourage us from publishing to your majesty, this our defence and apology : nevertheless, relying on the assistance of the Almighty, and hoping also in your majesty's clemency, we have done this ; to which the love of Christ constraineth us, and the importunity of our adversaries enforceth us. For they are not content with our afflictions and exile, nor think it enough to speak what they please of us in their pulpits, where none may control them ; but, in their printed books, they publicly traduce us to your majesty. Yet they do not duly convince us by the word of God, of those evils with which they reproach us. They think it sufficient to call us ' absurd Brownists ;' our conclusions, ' pestilential and blasphemous ;' our opinions, ' erroneous ;' and many of our assertions so absurd, that they are more deserving of being laughed at, than worthy of any confutation : but whether this dealing beseem learned men, and ministers of the Gospel, let the world judge. If we err, doubtless our error must continue with us, until some more orderly and Christian course be taken for our conviction.

“ As we doubt not that your majesty knoweth these things well ; so we trust the Lord will put it into your royal heart to do his good pleasure ; which we humbly desire, and spare not our utmost endeavours to promote. Heretofore when it pleased your majesty to have speech with some of us touching this cause, amongst other things your majesty uttered this worthy saying : ‘ That you were willing to take knowledge of any truth of God, since you had a soul and body to save as well as other men ; and that whosoever differs in religion, he must be careful always to have warrant from the word of God and antiquity.’ Accordingly we do humbly beseech your majesty by the mercies of our Lord Jesus Christ, to regard this cause again presented to your gracious view, as it shall be found agreeable to the word of truth, and no further ; and if our doctrine accord not with the ancient evidences of God's eternal Testament, where the good old way is to be sought and found ; if our faith be not the ancient faith of the apostles, and prophets, and patriarchs, let it be rejected as new and profane : but if our pleading be only for the right of Jesus the Son of David, that he may reign as King over his own church, by

the powerful sceptre of his own laws ; let it find favour in your majesty's eyes : lest He by whom kings reign, and whose eyes are upon his cause, should see it, and be displeased."

The Brownists presented to James no less than three petitions, for the secure and peaceable enjoyment of toleration. These petitions, showing their enlarged principles and good sense, they published with their confession of faith ; in the first of which they addressed the king in these words :

" Your majesty knoweth well, dread sovereign, how Jesus Christ the King of kings, in the primitive age of the Gospel, rode gloriously by his holy word, conquering and subduing people under him. The ministers and churches afterwards declining by degrees from the truth and simplicity of the Gospel, the antichristian apostacy and the mystery of iniquity began daily to prevail, till at length the usurped primacy became a terror to the kings, and the filthy superstition a poison to the nations of the earth. God in justice thus punished man's unthankful disobedience of Jesus Christ, and his Gospel of life and peace. Upon which have followed from age to age, the great and continual floods of God's wrath, overspreading the earth, though few have regarded.

" For this cause, we your majesty's humble and faithful subjects, have always been careful, how much soever traduced, both to acknowledge the true doctrines of the Gospel professed by the church of England, and to forsake the antichristian hierarchy, form of worship, and confusion of all sorts of people in the body of that church, which are yet mingled with other good things. The declaration of which particulars at large, we have presumed herewith to present to your highness in the confession of our faith ; that so you may have the true and full knowledge of our cause. If in any thing we err, (and who liveth without error ?) our humble and earnest desire is, that our errors may be shown us by the word of God, promising through his grace willingly to yield. Otherwise we dare not leave this faith, neither will your majesty require us ; lest we should deny Christ our Lord, in whom we believe : so do we speak, and so must we confess the truth of his Gospel, to the salvation of our souls.

" May it, therefore, please your majesty to take knowledge of this cause of Christ, witnessed by us his unworthy ser-

vants, in long and manifold affliction sustained at the hands of the prelates: that now by your royal authority, and for the love you bear to Christ, and the truth of the Gospel; we who seek the sincere practice of it, may be suffered to live in peace under your majesty's government and within your dominions, which we had rather than in any other place; and not be urged to the use or approbation of any remnants of popery or human traditions, but permitted peaceably to walk in the faith of the Gospel according to the Testament of Christ, we carrying ourselves in all loyalty, peace, and goodness, as becometh all faithful subjects in the Lord. Whom we pray to establish your throne in peace with much blessing, as he did to the good kings of Judah; who, rejecting all commixtures in the faith and worship of God, were careful to admit of no religion, nor any thing in religion, but that only which was warranted by the word of God. Mercy and truth preserve the king; for his throne shall be established with mercy. The throne of a king, who judgeth the poor in truth, shall be established for ever. The King of kings and Lord over all, by whom kings reign and princes decree justice, give your majesty a wise and understanding heart, to go in and out before your people in all godliness, wisdom, and prosperity: establishing your throne to your highness, and your royal posterity, long to reign over us in this life, and afterwards give you an eternal kingdom with Jesus Christ in the heavens."

This was the liberal and scriptural foundation on which these persecuted exiles erected their faith and practice. Their applications, however, proved unsuccessful. King James was caressed by the prelates, as the Solomon of the age, and as if he had been inspired by the Spirit of God; yet he could see no difference between the toleration of religion in the church, and the encouragement of sedition and rebellion in the state! His wisdom taught him to conclude, that the one unavoidably leads to the other; so that none of his peaceable and loyal protestant subjects were allowed to live in his dominions, if they scrupulously resolved to have a religion of their own choice, or could not in conscience receive the religion provided by the state. This was the mistaken principle on which the government of James, as well as his royal predecessor, was manifestly founded; and on this erroneous and dangerous

principle the governments of these two princes exercised all their detestable antichristian intolerance, destroying the dearest rights and benefits of mankind.

The generous principles of religious liberty began to be more clearly developed and explained by the persecuted Brownists, during their exile in Holland, than at any former period. Though they set out on principles in some respects too rigid, their minds, by hard study and heavy suffering, became much more liberalized, and they struck out into a middle path of truth and moderation. Their experience and their hardships, with what they beheld at home and in a foreign land, taught them an invaluable lesson, prompting them to a more close and unbiassed examination of the Gospel. This was particularly the case with the celebrated Mr. John Robinson, pastor of the English church at Leyden; who maintained that every particular church or society of Christians, as in apostolic times, had complete power within itself to choose its own officers, to administer the ordinances of the New Testament, and to exercise all necessary authority and discipline over its members: consequently, that it was *independent* of all classes, synods, convocations, and councils; and that it claimed and deserved the protection of the civil constitution, as its native and undeniable right. On this liberal and enlightened basis were the apostolic churches founded; and on the same basis was Mr. Robinson's church founded and governed in a foreign land.

When we take a correct view of the deplorable superstition and oppression, which every where prevailed at this period, we cannot wonder that a divine acting on these Christian principles should have met with much opposition and many combatants. His principles were reproached and misrepresented from every quarter. He, therefore, published to the world "A just and necessarie Apologie," in vindication of his opinions, and those of his church, against the slanderous misrepresentations of the opposite party. In this work, he states his views of the office and authority of the civil magistrate, which are exactly conformable to those of all sound protestants. The magistracy, says he, is one, and the power is one, whether in the person of a Christian or Heathen. There is not wanting in a Heathen magistrate power or authority to

promote order ; so by the accession of Christianity, his power is not increased, but only sanctified. The prince rules over his subjects, as he is a *prince* ; and the subjects obey him, as *subjects* ; but Jesus Christ is the Lord of our faith, and we are his subjects in matters of religion. There is also one Christian faith of the prince and the subject, and all things which spring from it are common to both. “ There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female : for all are one in Christ Jesus.” As there is not the least power of public administration comes to the subjects by their Christianity ; so by the same means the power of princes is not at all increased, nor is it possible that it should be. The magistrate, though a Heathen, hath full power, “ as the minister of God” for the good of his subjects, to command and prosecute whatsoever is not contrary to the word of God ; and, God forbid, that the Christian magistrate should claim the liberty to abuse his authority by doing more. But if he command what God forbids, or forbid what God commands, seeing it is the fault of the person, not of the office, the subjects are not freed from the bond of allegiance, but are bound to obey, if the thing commanded be lawful, or to suffer, if it be unlawful. If any additional power or authority come to the magistrate by his Christianity, then in case of his defection to idolatry, heresy, or profaneness, it must follow, that his kingly power is abridged and diminished. This would be founding dominion in grace. But how wide a door it would open to seditious tumults in the kingdom, under pretext of religion, no man can be ignorant.

As to the state of the church of England, Mr. Robinson adds, no man to whom England is known can be ignorant ; since all the subjects of the kingdom, be they ever such strangers to all true piety and goodness, or ever so much fraught with the most heinous impiety and wickedness, are without difference compelled and enforced by most severe penal laws into the body of the church : and of this confused heap, with a few good persons mingled among them, is that national church, commonly called the Church of England, collected and composed. Such is the material constitution of their churches, that they are distinguished not by an open profession of faith and repentance, and a voluntary association of its

members ; but only by the perambulation of their parishes, and the situation of their houses. Every subject in the kingdom dwelling in this or that parish, whether in city or country, is thereby, *ipso facto*, made legally a member of the parish in which his house is situated ; and he is bound, and all his with him, willing or unwilling, fit or unfit, as with bonds of iron, to be members of the church.*

This was, in his opinion, a most absurd notion of a Christian church, and of the qualifications of its members. On the contrary, he says—"This we hold and affirm, that a company consisting only of two or three gathered together to walk in all the ways of God, is a church, and so hath the whole power of Christ. Two or three thus gathered together, have the same right as two or three thousand : neither the smallness of their number, nor the meanness of their persons, can prejudice their rights." He allowed the expediency of associated Christian bodies for the reconciliation of differences among churches, by giving their friendly advice ; but not for exercising any act of authority, without the free consent of the churches themselves.

In the defence of these Christian principles, Mr. Robinson published his celebrated work, entitled, "A Justification of Separation from the Church of England." Upon the subject of *civil* and *ecclesiastical* government, he makes the following judicious distinctions :—In the word of God, civil officers are called princes, captains, judges, magistrates, lords, kings, principalities and powers, and their offices exactly accord with their names : but ecclesiastical officers are incapable of these titles, which can neither be given them without flattery, nor received without arrogance ; nor is their office an office of lordship, sovereignty, or authority, but of labour and service : so that they are labourers and servants of the church of God.—Magistrates may publish and execute their own laws in their own names ; but ministers are only interpreters of the laws of God, and must look for no further respect to the things which they speak, than as the same is agreeable to the Word of God.—Civil administrations, with their forms of government, are often altered according to existing circumstances, and to avoid

* Apologie, p. 57, 62.

inconveniences: but the church is a kingdom which cannot be moved, in which there may be no innovation in office, or in the form of administration, from that which Christ hath given for the regulation of his church to the end of the world.—Civil officers possess authority by their offices to judge offenders, and upon whom they may execute temporal judgment: but the officers of the church are the ministers of the people, whose service the people are to use in administering the censures of the church of God, against obstinate offenders; and this is the utmost that the church can legally perform.—In the civil government, obedience is due to the will and authority of the magistrate, who is lord over the bodies and goods of his subjects: but in the church of Christ, the appointed officers may not require, or the people present obedience, only in those things which are commanded in the word of God.

As the kingdom of Christ *is not of this world*; but is spiritual, and He its spiritual king; so must the government of this spiritual kingdom, and all the laws of it, under this spiritual king, be also spiritual. Jesus Christ, by the sceptre of his kingdom, rules and reigns over all; so that Christian magistrates, as well as others, ought to submit themselves to him; and the more Christian they are, the more meekly will they take upon them the yoke of Christ; and the greater authority they have, the more effectually will they advance his sceptre over themselves and their people. Nor can there be any reason why the merits of saints may not be mingled with the merits of Christ, in the salvation of the church; as well as the laws of men may be mixed with the laws of Christ, in the government of his church. He is as entire, and absolute a *King*, as he is a *priest*; and his people must be as careful to preserve the *dignity* of the one, as to enjoy the *benefits* of the other.*

These liberal and enlightened principles, as contained in several of Mr. Robinson's publications show that his mind was greatly expanded, and that he considered the Bible, and the Bible *alone*, as the religion of protestants, to the total exclusion of human authority, with all the shackles and superstitions of popery. The principles of religious liberty contained in his treatises, though at first published in a foreign land, dif-

* Justification, p. 36, 116.

fused light, and truth, and a spirit of moderation in his native country. His writings were extensively circulated, and his principles cordially received, by which the minds of men were restored to the possession, and the exercise of their native rights ; so that under God his enlightened efforts proved an invaluable benefit to the Christian church. The memory of JOHN ROBINSON will, therefore, be honoured and revered to the end of time, by all persons of enlightened and liberal minds, as one of the brightest ornaments of his country, and distinguished advocates of religious liberty.

The members of Mr. Robinson's church at Leyden were the first planters of New England ; whither they carried their principles, and acted upon them in the formation and government of the churches in that inhospitable and uncivilized country. At the same time, many of his brethren, who had been driven from their native country by the sword of persecution, derived signal benefit from a friendly intercourse with him, and embraced similar opinions upon church government, since known by the name of *Independency*. Among these was Mr. Henry Jacob, another learned puritan divine ; who, after cool and deliberate inquiry, published to the world the result of his convictions, in several treatises on the constitution and government of a Christian church. He afterwards returned to his native country ; and, in the year 1616, he formed a separate Christian church upon these principles in London. This was no rash act. He first communicated his intention to a number of learned and respectable divines ; who, seeing no prospect of a reformation of the national church, expressed their approbation of his design ; after which he called a number of his friends together, who entered into a voluntary association, and mutually agreed to unite in church fellowship, for a purer administration of the ordinances of Christ. He greatly improved the mode adopted by the Separatists in the reigns of queen Mary and Elizabeth, and moderated the rigid discipline of the zealous Brownists, and is considered as having laid the foundation of the first *independent* or congregational church in England, since the overwhelming domination of popery. On the same Christian principles other churches were afterwards formed in London and throughout the country.

About the same time a treatise was published by a number

of persons of the Baptist denomination, entitled, "Persecution Judged and Condemned;" in which, besides stating their peculiar views of baptism, they endeavoured to justify their separation from the established church, and to prove that every man has an equal right to judge for himself in matters of religion; and that to persecute any person on the score of religion, is illegal, antichristian, and contrary to the laws of God. But that against which they chiefly protested, was the pretended spiritual power and intolerance of the bishops, by which they were exposed to manifold hardships and unnatural oppressions. If it be granted, say they, that the kings of England have formerly given their power to the Romish beast, it will evidently appear that our lord the king, and all the magistrates under him, give their power to the same beast, though the beast be of another shape. Our most humble desire of his majesty is, that he would not give his power to force his faithful subjects to dissemble, by compelling them to believe as he believes, in the least measure of persecution: though it is no small persecution to lie many years in filthy prisons, in hunger, cold, and idleness, divided from wife, family, calling, and left in continual miseries and temptations, so that death would be to many less persecution.

How many, only for seeking reformation of religion, say they, have been put to death by this power in the days of queen Elizabeth? And how many, both then and since, have been consumed to death in prisons? Yea, since that spiritual power has been set up, hath not hanging, burning, exile, imprisonment, and all manner of contempt been used, and all for *religion*; and yet you see not this to be a bloody religion? Let the account from Mr. Fox or any other who has described the spiritual power of Rome, be compared with this spiritual power, in all their laws, courts, titles, pomp, and cruelty, and you will see they differ very little, except in the cruelties inflicted. It is grievous cruelty to lie for years in noisome and filthy prisons, and continual temptations of want, their estates overthrown, and many of them never coming out till death. Let it be well weighed, and it will be found very little inferior to the cruel sudden death, in times of the Romish power in this country.*

* Crosby's Baptists, vol. i. p. 124—127.

The Baptists afterwards, in the year 1620, presented their humble supplication to king James, the parliament then sitting; wherein they first acknowledge their obligation to pray for kings, and all that are in authority; and make their solemn appeal to God, that this was their constant practice. They set forth that their present miseries were occasioned, not only by the taking away of their goods, but also from long and lingering imprisonments of many years, in various counties of England; by which many died, leaving their widows and small children behind them; and all because they could not join in that worship which they did not believe to be according to the will of God.

They then challenged their enemies to accuse them of any disloyalty to his majesty, or of doing any injury to their neighbours; and declared their readiness to obey all the laws that were or should be made for the preservation of his majesty's person, and the security of his government in all *civil* matters: but further than this they could not go; because God was the Lord of their consciences, and the only lawgiver in matters of religion. They moreover signified, that if they were in an error, these cruel proceedings were in no respect becoming the charity and goodness of the Christian religion; but were the marks of antichrist, and those things for which they condemned the papists. Such methods, they acknowledged, might tempt men to become hypocrites; but it was beyond their power to enforce belief, or compel the heart.

They humbly solicited his majesty and parliament to consider their case according to the directions of God's word, and "let the wheat and tares grow together in the world, until the harvest." They endeavoured to prove at some length, that the sacred Scriptures were the rule of the Christian's faith, and not the decrees of any church, council, or potentate whatsoever. That the knowledge of God's will, and the practice of true religion, had been commonly found among the poor and despised in the world; while persons in high circumstances had often been in error, and the chief persecutors both of truth and its professors. That to persecute men for the sake of conscience, was contrary to the law of Christ, and condemned by ancient and modern writers, protestants and catholics, as a great iniquity. That to grant men liberty of

conscience in matters of religion, could be no prejudice to any commonwealth, neither could it deprive princes of any power or prerogative given them of God. And they concluded by praying to God for the king's majesty, for his royal highness the prince, and the two houses of parliament; calling God the searcher of hearts to witness, that they were true and loyal subjects to his majesty, not only for fear, but for conscience' sake.*

These heroic defences of the church of God and the liberties of Christians, clearly showed that all the light and truth in the nation was not extinguished; and, notwithstanding the extravagant prerogative of the king, together with the flagrant intolerance of the prelates, the righteous, liberal, and honourable spirit and principles of Christianity could not be totally obliterated. Though the object proposed by these pious advocates of liberty could not be realized, their generous efforts, not only discovered a spark of liberty still unextinguished, but softened the obdurate prejudice of many, and made a favourable impression on the public mind. Indeed, their excellent principles and worthy attempts made no impression upon James's towering prerogative, or his interested courtiers; yet they served to expand the minds of the people, and to improve their spirit and practice one towards another.

Towards the close of this reign, the government, the church, and the nation, presented a melancholy prospect. The flagrant encroachments of arbitrary power became so intolerable a grievance, that the subject was revived in the house of commons, when the house presented a petition to his majesty for a redress of abuses both in church and state. The commons avowed their unshaken loyalty to the king, and their zealous attachment to the religion of their country; yet his majesty having private intelligence of their petition, imperiously commanded the house, "that they should not henceforth presume to meddle with any mysteries of state, nor speak of his dearest son's match with the daughter of Spain, nor touch the honour of the Spanish king; and that if they had already touched any of those forbidden points, in any petition to be sent to him, except they reformed it before it came into his hands, he would not deign to hear or answer it."†

* Crosby, vol. i. p. 130—132.

† Prynne's Introdue. p. 12.

The commons, inflamed with the royal message, drew up a spirited reply, asserting their ancient and undoubted right, transmitted to them by their ancestors, to use freedom of debate in parliament, and to interpose with their counsel in all matters of government. They affirmed, that the liberties and privileges of parliament were the ancient and undeniable inheritance of Englishmen; and this was entered in their journal. The king, upon this bold adventure, sent for their journal, and tore it out with his own hand! In a few days, the parliament was dissolved; the leading members were imprisoned; and a proclamation issued, prohibiting all his majesty's subjects from *talking* of state affairs!*

Archbishop Abbot was, at this time, out of favour at court, because he would not trample on the laws and liberties of his country; but the court prelates made themselves much more powerful than at any former period. The suffering puritans instead of being convinced by arguments, the only proper weapons in this warfare, were treated without moderation, and without charity. The bishops resolved to make them conform to the church of England, in things which the imposers themselves considered indifferent, as well as in those that were deemed necessary.† Notwithstanding king James's infatuation against the Arminians in Holland, and his despotic and mad proceedings against the Leyden professor, he lived to change his opinion; when he became equally furious in the encouragement and advancement of Arminians, even among his own subjects! Arminians and papists, with such as had no concern about religion, were the only persons favoured and promoted, those only who held for the royal prerogative being considered as protestants at court. The pulpits were generally filled with men of arbitrary principles; and those who presumed to defend the rights and privileges of the subjects, were severely rewarded for their pains. One of the preachers of the university of Oxford having declared in his sermon, "that subordinate magistrates might lawfully use force and defend themselves, the commonwealth, and the true religion, against the chief magistrate when he turns tyrant, when he forces the subjects upon blasphemy or idolatry, and

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 502.

† Rapin, vol. ii. p. 358.

when resistance is the only expedient to secure their lives, their fortunes, and the liberty of their consciences ;” he was convened before his ecclesiastical judges, and his authority for these assertions demanded. He answered, that it was the opinion of Paræus on Rom. xiii. ; but that his principal authority was king James, who was then affording assistance to the oppressed Rochellers against their natural prince.* Upon this unexpected reply, the preacher was committed to the Gatehouse ; Paræus’s Commentary was publicly burnt at Oxford, Cambridge, and Paul’s cross ; and his assertions were condemned as false and seditious. This was insufficient to satisfy the abettors of the prerogative. The university of Oxford passed a decree in full convocation, “ that it was not lawful for subjects to take up arms against their king, on any pretence whatever ;” and, to bind the clergy to eternal slavery, all graduates in the university, or to be admitted hereafter, were obliged to subscribe and swear, “ that they do not only at present condemn and detest the propositions of Paræus, but that they will always continue in the same opinion.”†

“ To compel any one to swear, that he will never alter his opinions about controversial divinity, is a grievous imposition.”‡ This was the grievous imposition in the reign of king James ; who, says a reverend prelate, was a mere pedant, without judgment, courage, or steadiness, being the very scorn of the age ; and whose reign was a continued course of mean practices.§ By his ill conduct, the protestant religion was entirely rooted out of Bohemia, the electoral dignity transferred from the Palatine family, the Palatine itself lost, and the liberty of Germany overthrown.|| My author adds, that he grasped at immoderate power, but with an ill grace, and, if we believe the historians of that time, with a design to make his people *little*. In this he had his desire ; for from his first accession to the crown, the reputation of England began to sink ; and two kingdoms which, disunited, had each apart made a considerable figure in the world, now when united under one king, fell short of the reputation which the least of them had in former ages. The latter years of king James

* Echard, p. 440.

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 504.

‡ Jortin’s Remarks, vol. i. Pref. p. 11.

§ Burnet, vol. i. p. 17.

|| Welwood, p. 32.

filled our annals with misfortunes at home and abroad. The continued struggle between him and his parliament about redress of grievances, helped to lessen his credit in foreign countries, and to imbitter the minds of his subjects at home. He repented of these unpropitious measures too late, and, says Burnet, no king ever died less lamented, or less esteemed.* He finished his course, March 27, 1625, having reigned twenty-two years. Thus ended one of the most inglorious reigns recorded in English history, of which the foregoing facts afford ample illustration, displaying its melancholy aspect upon the religion, and the liberties of the people.

In opposition, however, to these facts, Dr. Joseph Hall, dean of Worcester, afterwards bishop of Norwich, having passed the highest encomium on king James's knowledge, declared, that his *justice in governing* outstripped his knowledge; and that he always endeavoured to frame the proceedings of his government to the laws, not the laws to them. Among all his heroical graces, as a man, as a Christian, as a king, his *piety* and *firmness in religion* were most conspicuous!† Bishop Laud affirms, that the sweetness of king James's nature was scarcely to be paralleled, and little less than a miracle; that he was eminent for clemency, mercy, justice, and peace; and that he was the most learned and religious prince that England ever knew!!‡ A learned historian, on the contrary, affirms, that as the desire of unlimited power and authority was the reigning passion of his heart; so all his measures, whether civil or ecclesiastical, were calculated to answer the purposes of his ambition. He was the bitterest enemy to the doctrine and discipline of the puritans, to which he had been warmly attached; the most inflexible and ardent patron of the Arminians, in whose ruin and condemnation in Holland he had been singularly instrumental; and the most zealous defender of episcopal government, against which he had more than once declared his sentiments in the strongest language.§

Contrary to the fears of pious men, the despotic and absurd measures of this reign were overruled for much good, and

* Welwood, p. 19, 20.—Burnet, vol. i. p. 17. † Strype, vol. iv. p. 362, 363.

‡ Breviate of Laud, p. 5.

§ Mosheim, vol. v. p. 385, 392.

rendered favourable to religion. Those who retained an attachment to Calvinism, which was considered as the doctrine of the reformation, and those who were friends to the constitution, in opposition to the absolute power of the king, were thrown into one common mass ; who, by the impolitic measures of the king, were daily becoming more numerous and popular. Some of the nobility, and many of the independent gentlemen in the country, received the persecuted ministers into their houses, and made them tutors to their children, by which was formed a generation, which, in the ensuing reign, took part in that great struggle against despotism, which overturned both the throne and the altar. The oppressed puritans, who fled from the cruelties of Bancroft and others, imitated the Christians, at the persecution which arose about Stephen, by diffusing their principles to the ends of the earth. The religion of these persecuted servants of God was carried across the Atlantic, and planted in the extensive regions of America. On the new continent, unmolested and undefiled religion prevailed ; but in the mother country, it was for a time nearly annihilated.



CHAPTER VII.

THE REIGN OF KING CHARLES I.



SECTION I.

Ecclesiastical Claims subversive of Religious Freedom.

ON the death of king James, his only son CHARLES was proclaimed his successor to the crown. The accession of this prince brightened, for a moment, the prospects of the friends of liberty. He was thought to be favourable to their views, especially as his tutor, and all those about him, were

persons eminently distinguished for principles of moderation.* But their hopes were soon blasted. He made no alteration in the ministry, the council, or the favourites of the court; but one of his principal objects was to raise the regal authority still higher than in the reign of his father, or any of his predecessors. This endeared object engaged his assiduous attention for the space of fifteen years; after which it was abandoned as impracticable.† England was unwilling to relapse into its former midnight darkness, and to yield a blind and slavish subjection to the arbitrary pleasure of a prince, whose judgment was under the entire control of his courtiers.

King Charles possessed certain qualities which raised his character considerably higher than that of his father. He was not deficient in natural abilities; and had his principles been as good as his abilities, he would have governed his people with reputation and esteem. In his private conduct he observed external decorum, discouraged the vices that inundated the court in the late reign, and was very regular at his devotions. These good qualities, however, were overbalanced by some of a very different description. With lofty notions of the absolute power of princes, and the unlimited obedience of subjects, he formed the wild scheme of governing without parliaments, and levied taxes upon his subjects merely by virtue of his prerogative.

When first placed upon the throne, his prospects were not the most encouraging, his father having bequeathed to him an unnecessary expensive war, an incumbered revenue, an exhausted treasury, and a discontented people.‡ The king's marriage with a French princess, a notorious papist, having been concluded a little before his father's death, was realized a few months after that event: but this was deemed an unfavourable circumstance by English protestants; and the consequence, as might have been expected, was found prejudicial to his interest and reputation. The entrance of the new queen was an event more fatal than the plague; for, says bishop Kennet, "considering the malignity of the popish religion, the imperiousness of the French government, the influence of a stately queen over an affectionate husband, and the share

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 19.

† Rapin, vol. ii. p. 238.

‡ Welwood, p. 20.

she must have in the education of her children, it was easy to foresee that it might prove very fatal to our English prince and people, and lay up vengeance for future generations.”*

On the arrival of the queen, the first parliament assembled for the despatch of business, when his majesty addressed his two houses upon the subject of religion, in these words:—“Some malicious persons, as I hear, have given out, that I am not so true a keeper and maintainer of the true religion I profess; but I assure you, that I may say with St. Paul, that I have been trained up at the feet of Gamaliel; and although I shall never be so arrogant as to assume to myself the rest, I shall so far show the end of it, that all the world may see that none hath been, nor ever shall be, more desirous to maintain the religion I profess, than I shall be.”†

The two houses of parliament having taken his majesty's speech into consideration, agreed to present him with their joint petition against popish recusants, which the king graciously received; assuring them that he was glad to behold their zeal for religion, and should be ready to concur with them in whatever they should propose on that head. Notwithstanding these gratifying promises, his majesty absolutely forgot or disregarded them; for the progress of popery was visible in every quarter, and certain catholics were now released from prison, having received the royal pardon. The commons, therefore, complained that Roman catholics were tolerated and countenanced, contrary to his majesty's promises and the laws of the land.‡

These murmurs so much prevailed in the parliament, that the king thought himself obliged to pay some attention to the petition of the two houses; and his answers to the various particulars gave so much satisfaction, that they wanted only the performance of his royal word, to gain him the esteem and confidence of his protestant subjects. If we may judge from the continual complaints upon this point throughout this reign, we may conclude, that his majesty's promises were observed no better than those of his father. It is, indeed, a little surprising, that the king should have given these assurances,

* Bp. Kennet, vol. ii. p. 4.

† Rushworth, vol. i. p. 172.

‡ Warner, vol. ii. p. 511.

within six months after he had signed the marriage articles, in which he had engaged "that all the catholics in prison should be set at liberty, and that they should be no more searched or molested for their religion." Upon this, swarms of papists, with raised expectations, made their appearance, and resorted openly to mass; while Jesuits and seminary priests came from abroad without restraint, and with great zeal propagated their opinions in town and country.* Thus, though the king sent a letter to the archbishop to proceed against them, and issued a proclamation to recall the English youth from the foreign popish seminaries, the very next day he released by a special warrant eleven catholic priests from prison, and continued the popish nobility and gentry in the principal offices of trust.†

The commons having long considered the duke of Buckingham as a person dangerous to the government, and prejudicial to the interests of the country, petitioned the king to remove his favourite from his presence; at which his majesty took great offence, and immediately dissolved the parliament. From this time the true spirit of the government became too manifest to be misunderstood.

On the dissolution of the parliament, the king published his royal proclamation for the due regulation of the orthodox doctrine of the church of England, which in the opinion of certain courtiers was in danger of going out of square; therefore his majesty in the integrity of his heart, and singular providence for the peaceable government of his people, thought fit, by the advice of his bishops, to declare and publish to all the world, his utter dislike of all those who adventured to start any new opinions differing from the orthodox grounds of religion established in the church of England: also to declare his full and constant resolution, that neither in the doctrine nor discipline of the church would he admit of the least innovation; but by God's assistance he would so guide the sceptre of these kingdoms, as should be most for the comfort of his sober, religious, and well-affected subjects. Wherefore he straitly charged and commanded all the subjects of his realms of England and Ireland of what degree soever, especially

* Rushworth, vol. i. p. 169.—Prynne's *Introduc.* p. 74.

† Rushworth, vol. i. p. 191, 194.—Warner, vol. ii. p. 314, 315.

churchmen, henceforth to carry themselves so wisely and conscientiously, that neither by writing, preaching, printing, conference, or otherwise, they should raise, publish, or maintain any other religious opinions, than were clearly warranted by the doctrine and discipline of the church of England as by authority established. He enjoined his archbishops and bishops in their several dioceses speedily to reclaim and repress all such as should in the least degree, attempt to violate this bond of peace, while all the ministers of justice were required to execute his majesty's pious and royal pleasure herein expressed; and if any had the boldness to neglect this gracious admonition, his majesty would proceed against them with that severity which their contempt should deserve, that by their exemplary punishment others might be warned, and that those who were studious of the peace and prosperity of the church and commonwealth, might bless God for his majesty's *religious, wise, just, and gracious* government.*

This extraordinary infringement on the religious opinions and discussions of the people, if we may judge from the execution of it, was intended to produce, under the most specious pretensions, a complete innovation and revolution in the doctrines of the established church. Those doctrines had, for nearly *seventy* years, been invariably considered as Calvinistic, and, as such, had with very few exceptions been most cordially received and subscribed: there was no dispute about the *doctrine* of the church through this protracted period. But, remarkable as it may seem, the execution of his majesty's proclamation, which was in the hands of bishop Laud and his colleagues, was directed against all who propagated the Calvinistic doctrines, from the pulpit, or the press, or in *private conference*; while it gave an uncontrollable liberty to the tongues and pens of zealous Arminians. This uncatholic measure, the spirit of which had breathed in the late reign, was certainly the most extraordinary innovation that England had ever witnessed since the accession of queen Elizabeth, as the event proved with the evidence of demonstration. By the sage advice of bishops Laud and Neile, the royal document was published; and by the execution of it, the clergy were prohi-

* Rushworth, vol. i. p. 412.

bited from teaching or preaching, in public or private, those doctrines which they believed, which they found laid down in the word of God, which they had subscribed *willingly* and *from their hearts*, and which for more than half a century had been established by act of parliament. This was the actual encroachment on the liberties of the clergy, and on the doctrines established in the church of England; and while the Arminian tenets were every where countenanced and promoted by the ruling prelates, the Calvinistic ministers were interrupted and prosecuted for attempting to promote their own views of the Gospel. As the Arminian clergy were preferred, applauded, protected, and freely tolerated in the propagation of their peculiar sentiments; so when the contrary party wrote in defence of the received doctrines of the *thirty-nine* articles, they were censured in the high commission, and their books suppressed; when they ventured to preach or dispute upon those points, they were suspended, imprisoned, compelled to recant, or banished into a foreign land.*

These odious severities alarmed the better part of the nation. To silence and cruelly punish the ministers of Christ for preaching the doctrines which they believed, and to deprive the people of those heavenly truths which appeared to them agreeable to the word of God, and were esteemed the very food which God had provided for their souls, was more than they could bear. The distressed ministers, therefore, unitedly complained of these hardships in their petition to the king, saying—"Your majesty's proclamation and declaration are so interpreted, and pressed upon us, that we are not a little discouraged and deterred from preaching those saving doctrines of God's free grace in election and predestination, which greatly confirm our faith of eternal salvation, and fervently kindle our love to God, as the seventeenth article expressly mentions: so that we are brought into a great strait, either of incurring God's heavy displeasure, if we do not faithfully discharge our embassy, in declaring all the counsel of God; or the danger of being censured as violaters of your majesty's edicts, if we preach these constant doctrines of our church, and confute the opposite Pelagian and Arminian heresies, both of

* Prynne's Doome, p. 161.

which are boldly preached and printed without fear of censure. The saving doctrines of Christ are prohibited, and these heresies favoured, which king James called *arrogant* and *atheistical*; and those who avowed them to be agreeable to religion and the church of England, he called gross *liars* and maintainers of *heresy*. We, therefore, your majesty's obedient, peaceable, and conformable subjects to all your majesty's laws, being most tenderly sensible of the dishonour of Christ and your majesty, infinitely more dear to us than our lives; most humbly on our bended knees, beseech your gracious majesty, to take into your princely consideration the evils and grievances under which we groan; and, as a wise physician, prescribe and apply such speedy remedies, as may cure the present maladies, and preserve the church and state from all those plagues with which our neighbours have been much distressed."*

In the execution of the king's proclamation, this antichristian intolerance was not confined to the lower orders of the clergy, but extended to all without distinction. Dr. Davenant, the learned and excellent bishop of Salisbury, was a sharer in the common calamity. This prelate was a celebrated Calvinist, and one of the divines whom king James appointed to represent the church of England at the Synod of Dort, where he behaved with great prudence and moderation; but in the beginning of the reign of king Charles, he became obnoxious to the court, for the singular crime of preaching on the doctrine of predestination, in his sermon before the king, from these words: "The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." This was deemed a contempt of his majesty's proclamation; for which his adversaries at court endeavoured to bring him into disgrace. Two days after the sermon, he was summoned before the privy-council; where he presented himself on his knees, and on his knees he must have remained, if none others had felt more compassion for him than his right reverend brethren. But the *temporal* lords bade him arise, and stand in his own defence. The accusation was managed by Dr. Harsnet, archbishop of York, who made a long and warm oration; bishop Laud walking backwards and for-

* Prynne's Doome, p. 165.

wards all the time in silence. Harsnet reminded him of his manifold obligation to king James; then extolled the piety and circumspection of his present majesty's injunctions; and then aggravated his contempt of them with great vehemence and acrimony. Bishop Davenant replied with great meekness in his own defence, that he was grieved that the established doctrine of the church should be thus distasted; that he had only preached that which even his accusers acknowledged to be truth; and that which was expressly contained in the seventeenth article, and he was ready to justify the truth of it. To this it was replied, that the doctrine was not gainsaid; but the king had commanded that these questions should not be debated; therefore his majesty took it more offensively to hear his own commands violated. The venerable prelate replied, that he never understood that his majesty had forbidden the handling of any doctrine comprised in the articles of the church, but only the raising of new questions, or putting a new sense upon them, which he had not done, nor ever intended: adding, that in the king's declaration all the thirty-nine articles are recognized, among which the seventeenth on predestination is one; that all ministers were obliged to subscribe to the truth of this article, and all subjects to continue in the profession of it, as well as the rest; then he desired that it might be shown wherein he had transgressed his majesty's commands, when he had rigorously kept within the bounds of the article, without moving any new or curious questions. To this it was replied, that it was his majesty's pleasure, for the peace of the church, that these high questions should be forborne! The bishop then said, he was sorry that he had misunderstood his majesty's intention; but now being made acquainted with it, he should in future conform to his royal commands. Upon this he was dismissed from the council without further trouble; and, after some time, was allowed to kiss the king's hand; when Charles did not fail to remind him that the doctrine of predestination was *too high* for the people's understandings; therefore he was resolved not to allow the discussion of it in the pulpit!*

From the earliest dawn of the reformation we have heard

* Fuller, b. xi. p. 138—140.

the clamorous cry against *novelty* and *innovation*. Who then were the aggressors? Those whose very souls revolted at the existing corruptions in the church, and who sought by their petitions, their preaching, and their prayers, to obtain a purer reformation; or those who endeavoured, by this scandalous intolerance, to overturn and root out even the *doctrine* established by the laws of the realm? Will it be said, that his majesty never intended to carry things to such extremity, but only to suppress all disputation on the controverted and least important points of religion? If so, the conduct of the ruling prelates, who grossly perverted the royal intentions, and shamefully violated the statute law, was certainly the more reprehensible; and their *novelties* and *innovations*, not in ceremony, but in *doctrine*, the more dangerous to the church and the nation. If their lordships perverted his majesty's intention, to fulfil their own episcopal purposes, they were guilty of unwarrantable infringement on the liberties of Christians, and of flagrant usurpation of the power and authority of God, who is the only lawgiver concerning what doctrines his ministers shall preach and his church receive. No man, or body of men, without a direct warrant from heaven, can with justice prescribe and impose religious doctrines upon Christians; and every attempt to do this, whether by pope, or prince, or prelate, without a divine warrant, is a usurpation of the prerogative of God, and an oppression of the rights of conscience.

The question is not whether the Calvinistic or Arminian doctrine is the true doctrine, according to the standard of the *Bible*; but the glaring fact recorded on the page of history is, that king Charles and his bishops endeavoured, with great zeal, to overturn the doctrine of the church of England established by act of parliament, and to incorporate another doctrine more agreeable to their own imaginations, without consulting the parliament or the people, and without the least warrant or authority from God for so great an undertaking. They sought to subvert that doctrine which king James had been so zealous to uphold, and to establish that doctrine which that monarch had been so furious to annihilate, not only among his own subjects, but in the states of Holland. Thus, usurping the power and prerogative of God, by placing themselves on his throne, they might have challenged, not only all their

honourable predecessors, but all the successors of St. Peter, to have furnished a more unwarrantable aggression.

The parliament in vain protested against these unhallowed measures. All the petitions which they presented to his majesty were without effect; yet they openly declared their sentiments in the house of commons, and unreservedly exposed the odious aggressions. After much learned discussion, which is still on record, the house of commons entered into the following solemn vow:—"We the commons in parliament assembled, do claim, protest, and avow for truth, the sense of the articles of religion, which were established by parliament, in the thirteenth year of our late queen Elizabeth; which by the public act of the church of England, and by the general and current expositions of the writers of our church, have been delivered unto us. And we reject the sense of the Jesuits and Arminians, and all others, wherein they differ from us."*

These interesting documents at once show in what light the religious aggressions were considered by the house of commons, and with how dignified a spirit they opposed the ecclesiastical innovations of the crown and prelates. The guardians of the laws and liberties of England, resolved on this occasion not to yield tamely to the overthrow of the constitution, and to leave even their own souls, and the souls of the people, in a state of eternal slavery to the overwhelming despotism. They made a noble and constitutional resistance against the arbitrary encroachment of those in power; and their fidelity and magnanimity will be admired by all generous minds, so long as Britain shall be able to claim and enjoy her native rights.

Had the king possessed any military force on which he could have placed sufficient dependence, it is probable that he would at once have cast off the mask, and have governed without regard to the ancient laws and constitution. But his army was insufficient to support so violent a measure; nevertheless he had recourse to extraordinary methods of raising money. An open commission, in violation of the royal promise at Oxford, was granted to the archbishop of York and others, to compound with the convicted catholics in the ten northern

* Rushworth, vol. i. p. 645—650.

counties, and to agree to the dispensation of the penal laws enacted against them. A general loan from all his majesty's subjects was ordered in council, and commissioners sent to levy it, under arbitrary and severe penalties, throughout the kingdom. Thus the government, under the sole control of the crown and the court favourites, became a terror to the country, and a public robber of the wealth of the nation !

To convince the people, that it was their duty to submit to this loan, and to give the king their money when he demanded it, the clergy were employed to preach the doctrine of passive obedience in its fullest extent, and to prove that an unlimited submission to the royal pleasure was the doctrine of Scripture. Among the learned divines who advocated this cause, was Dr. Sibthorp ; who, in an assize sermon at Northampton, advanced these extraordinary sentiments :—" It is the duty of the prince, who is the head, to direct and make laws. He doth whatsoever he pleases. Where the word of a king is, there is power ; and who may say to him, What doest thou ? If princes command any thing which subjects may not perform, because it is against the laws of God, or of nature, or impossible ; yet subjects are bound to undergo the punishment, without resistance, or railing, or reviling, and so to yield a passive obedience where they cannot exhibit an active one."*

It will appear almost incredible, that such doctrine could be preached in England by a man of any rank in the church ; yet there were courtiers in his audience, equally servile as the preacher, who recommended him to the king for his loyal and profitable sermon. The king was so much gratified with the new doctrine, that he sent the sermon to archbishop Abbot, with a command to license it for publication. But Abbot had too much good sense and honesty, and too great a regard for the laws of his country, to obey in this instance the royal command, and to sanction and support so scandalous a doctrine by his own example.† The sermon upon this was presented to bishop Laud, who approved of it as *discreet* and *learned*, and licensed it for the press, under the title of " Apostolical Obedience." The king was, in the mean time, so much incensed

* Rushworth, vol. i. p. 423.

† Ibid. p. 455.

at the archbishop's refusal, that, without further ceremony, he not only banished him to a moorish, unhealthy place beyond Canterbury, but also suspended him from his archiepiscopal jurisdiction, and placed that jurisdiction in the hands of commissioners. Our author adds, that none of Charles's favourite historians have attempted to vindicate him in this illegal oppression of the venerable primate ; therefore I shall make no reflections upon it : reflections upon this instance of despotic arbitrary power would be impertinent, when the whole nation was treated as a conquered province !*

It will be proper to notice another instance of arbitrary doctrine. Dr. Manwaring preached before the king at Whitehall ; and it was found upon inquiry, that his sermon was printed by his majesty's special command. Among other passages subversive of truth and liberty, he affirmed, " that the king is not bound to observe the laws of the realm, concerning the subject's rights and liberties ; but that his royal word and command in imposing loans and taxes, *without consent of parliament*, doth oblige the subject's *conscience*, upon pain of *eternal damnation* ; and that those who refused to pay this loan, offended against the law of God, and became guilty of *impiety, disloyalty, and rebellion* !"† This doctrine was no doubt extremely gratifying to the ears of king Charles, who, to make his subjects acquainted with it, and regulate their practice by it, gave it his royal sanction, and ordered it to be printed : but no doctrine could have been more subversive of the English constitution, or more destructive of the laws and rights of Britain. By this doctrine the royal word and command *alone*, might have seized all the wealth in the nation, and the subjects must have quietly submitted, upon pain of eternal damnation ; and the least refusal would have exposed a man to all the disgrace of impiety, disloyalty, and rebellion ! Was ever any opinion more preposterously absurd ? Yet this is the monstrous doctrine of passive obedience and nonresistance.

The commons in parliament could not suffer the propagation of these obnoxious opinions to pass unnoticed. Manwaring's dangerous doctrine was submitted to the examination of a committee of the house, the result of which was reported by

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 515, 516.

† Welwood, p. 40.

one of their leading members, in the following accusations:—
“ He labours to infuse into the conscience of his majesty, the persuasion of a power not bounded by law ; which king James, in his speech to the parliament, calls tyranny accompanied with perjury.—He endeavours to persuade the consciences of the subjects, that they are bound to obey illegal commands ; yea he damns them for not obeying them.—He robs the subjects of their goods.—He brands those who will not give up their goods with most scandalous and odious titles, to make them hateful both to prince and people ; and to make a division between the head and members, and among the members themselves. To the same end, not much unlike Faux and his colleagues, he seeks to blow up parliaments and parliamentary power.”

The charges were carried to the upper house, upon which the lords gave sentence, that he should pay a fine of a thousand pounds, make a public submission at the bar of the two houses, be imprisoned during their pleasure, be suspended for three years, be disabled from holding hereafter any ecclesiastical dignity or secular office, be for ever disabled from preaching at court, and that his sermon should be called in and publicly burnt.* This sentence, on the part of the lords, was certainly unconstitutional ; for they had power only to imprison during their own session. No sooner was the session closed, than Manwaring, so obnoxious to the two houses, was not only pardoned by the king, but promoted to an ecclesiastical benefice of great value, and afterwards to a bishopric. His majesty's conduct in the pardon and preferment of Manwaring, with several other similar culprits, was disgusting to all sober persons in the two houses of parliament, and among the common people.

Upon the misunderstanding between the king and the parliament, the obnoxious doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance became the fashionable doctrines of all court favourites ; and, says Burnet, “ nothing was so much heard of as the law of government from God, antecedent to all human laws. Out of this sprung illegal imprisonments, illegal monopolies, severe proceedings in the star-chamber, and, above all,

* Rushworth, vol. i. p. 585, 605.

the ship-money. These things put the nation in a universal disjoining and feebleness; and when unavoidable necessity afterwards forced the king to call a parliament, the fatal effects of those councils broke out terribly.”*

These unprecedented encroachments on the property, as well as on the religion of the subjects, were productive of general murmuring and dissatisfaction. This is not the proper place to detail all the attempts to overthrow the constitution and laws of the land, to rule the three kingdoms with a rod of iron, and to bring the bodies and souls of the people into worse than Egyptian slavery. The glaring facts, as inscribed on the faithful page of history, will remain to all unbiassed observers as durable as time.

The king seemed unconscious of his own arbitrary measures; or, at least, he denied that it ever entered his heart to extend the prerogative beyond the legal boundaries, to the injury of any of his subjects. In his speech to the house of lords, he said—“To clear our conscience and just intentions, this we publish, that it is not in our heart, nor will we ever extend our royal power, lent us from God, beyond the just rule of *moderation*, in any thing which shall be contrary to our laws and customs, wherein the safety of our people shall be our only aim.”† In his majesty’s declaration to all his loving subjects, published upon the dissolution of the same parliament, he said—“We do here declare, that we will maintain the ancient and just rights and liberties, with so much constancy and justice, that they shall have cause to acknowledge, that, under our government and gracious protection, they live in a more happy and free estate, than any subjects in the Christian world!—As we will maintain our subjects in their just liberties; so we do and will expect, that they yield as much submission and duty to our royal prerogative, and as ready obedience to our authority and commandments, as hath been performed to the greatest of our predecessors.”‡

Though the king had so zealously opposed those doctrines which were openly preached and professedly established as the only true doctrines of the church of England, throughout the

* Bp. Burnet’s Speech, p. 4.

† Rushworth, vol. i. p. 560.

‡ Ibid. Appen. p. 10.

reign of Elizabeth and the former part of the reign of James ; and though he had encouraged and assisted the court prelates in the subversion of those doctrines, and in the propagation of the contrary opinions ; his majesty, in the foregoing document, made this open declaration and solemn appeal to heaven :—
“ We call God to record, before whom we stand, that it is, and always hath been, our heart’s desire to be found worthy of that title, which we account the most glorious of all our crown, *Defender of the Faith* : neither shall we ever give way to the authorizing of any thing, whereby *any innovation* may creep into the church, but to preserve *that unity of doctrine* and discipline, established in the time of queen Elizabeth, whereby the church of England ever since hath stood and flourished !!”*

The reconciliation of his majesty’s proclamation and practice, with the sentiments contained in this royal declaration, we must necessarily leave to posterity. The unbounded power assumed by the crown, with the numerous oppressions and cruelties which followed, laid the foundation for all the horrors of civil war, and for the overthrow of church and state.

Unhappily for the king, as well as the nation, bishop Laud acquired the entire ascendancy over him ; and it was the great misfortune of this prince, that, as he was inflexible in his purposes, he was directed in them by men of the most arbitrary and intolerant principles. Under the direction of these principles, the king dissolved his parliament, and imprisoned some of the leading members, intending to govern without them. This created almost universal disgust and murmuring among his subjects. Here a remarkable scene opens to our view : a king of England governing by orders of council and proclamations, setting aside the parliament and the laws of the land. The administration of ecclesiastical affairs, in the hands of Laud, was conducted without discretion or humanity. This prelate introduced many new ecclesiastical observances which gave the church of England an appearance resembling catholic superstition, and imposed them with pride and petulance, equally offensive as the things themselves. The churches were beautified with pictures, paintings, images, and altar-pieces ; and the forms of worship were ornamented with nu-

* Rushworth, vol. i. Appen. p. 4.

merous rites and ceremonies. There was too much reason to believe, that the church of England was relapsing fast into Romish superstition. His holiness had some hopes of regaining his authority in this island, and offered Laud twice a cardinal's hat, as an inducement to forward his good intentions.

The celebrated judge Whitelock used to say, previous to Laud's advancement, that his zeal was too furious for the church, and that, if he continued in this way, he "would set the nation on fire."* There can be no doubt, that the genius of this prelate's religion, was the same, only in a less degree, as that of Rome: the same profound respect was demanded to the sacerdotal character; the same submission required to creeds and the decrees of councils; the same pomp and ceremony affected in the forms of worship; and the same superstitious regard to days and postures, to meats, names, and garments. This bishop's heart was so fully set upon the advancement and grandeur of the church of England, that he is said to have raised it to a rivalship, rather than a resemblance of the church of Rome !†

By the fatal policy and intolerance of this hot and furious prelate, many persons, well affected to the hierarchy, but enemies to Arminianism, or to arbitrary power, were driven to renounce their former sentiments, and to join themselves with the persecuted puritans. This greatly encouraged and strengthened the advocates of better principles, and enabled them to oppose, with greater firmness, the illegal measures of the court. The bishop's heart was set on the advancement of the church, which was carried on at the expence of the king's prerogative, and the liberties of the nation. Those doctrines which the Romish church had borrowed from the fathers, freeing the spiritual from a subordination to the civil power, were adopted by this prelate, and interwoven with his political and religious opinions. A divine and apostolical charter was pretended and maintained, as preferable to that which was parliamentary. The sacerdotal character was magnified as sacred and indefeasible; while the right of private judgment and liberty of conscience, on spiritual subjects, was in a manner annihilated.‡

* Echard, p. 420.

† Ibid. p. 454.

‡ Warner, vol. ii. p. 519—521.

Bishop Laud's superstition, however offensive to common sense, was tolerable when compared with his cruelties. These chill the Christian's blood. No man possessed of the common sympathies of human nature can read the sufferings of Prynne, Burton, Bastwick, Lilburn, Leighton, and Williams, without the greatest horror, concluding that the monster's heart was steeled against every feeling of humanity.

Amidst these terrific oppressions, a plan was adopted which, for a time, proved a partial remedy, and served to diffuse better principles in many parts of the country. A design was formed by a number of gentlemen and clergy, to promote the preaching of the Gospel by setting up lectures in the principal market towns; when they bought, by voluntary contributions, such impropriations as were in the hands of the laity, which they divided into salaries of forty or fifty pounds a year, for the support of the lecturers. The trustees expended nearly six thousand pounds, and the design was highly applauded by most persons: but Laud, viewing the project with an evil and a jealous eye, as if it was likely to prove hostile to his own views or interests, applied to the king, and obtained an information against all the feoffees in the exchequer. The feoffment was therefore cancelled, their proceedings declared illegal, the impropriations already purchased confiscated to the king, and the feoffees themselves prosecuted in the star-chamber.*

The illegal proceedings of the *council-table*, the *star-chamber*, and the *high commission*, were unparalleled in this reign. The account is given by lord Clarendon, who cannot be supposed to magnify the aggressions. The two former of these courts, says he, were become courts of *law*, to determine matters of *right*; and courts of *revenue*, to bring money into the treasury. The council-table, by proclamations, enjoined upon the people what was not enjoined by law; and the star-chamber punished the disobedience of those proclamations by heavy fines and imprisonment. The exorbitances of this court were such, that there were very few persons of quality who did not suffer more or less, by the weight of its censures and judgments. The high commission became justly odious, not only by meddling with things not within its cognizance, but by ex-

* Prynne's Doome, p. 385—387.

tending its sentences and judgments to a degree that was unjustifiable, and by treating the common law, and the professors of it, with great contempt. From an ecclesiastical court for the reformation of manners, it became a court of *revenue*, imposing heavy fines upon the subjects.* Had not this system of oppression been well authenticated, we should have thought it almost too abominable to exist. It was the monster of impiety and iniquity, impolicy and injustice !

This is not a distorted picture ; but a just portrait of the detestable English Inquisition. With this before our eyes, the applause of king Charles and his government, so often sounded by interested persons in modern times, is both disgusting and odious. These courts were considered as the grand pillars for upholding the ecclesiastical establishment ; while they were made the powerful engines of supplying the royal treasury, at the expense of justice, humanity, and Christianity. They brought general devastation upon the oppressed subjects, detaining multitudes for a long time in prison, without bringing them to trial, or acquainting them with the cause of their commitment. Their terrific proceedings were, in some respects, more barbarous than the popish *Inquisition* ; because they suspended, degraded, excommunicated, and imprisoned with unmerciful severity, great numbers of learned and pious ministers, without the breach of any established law. They established a kind of lawless and unbounded despotism, both in church and state ; and while they inflicted tremendous pains and penalties upon the best protestants in the nation, the papists lived in general without molestation. The high commission in particular trampled upon the laws of God and nature, daily compelling men by the oath *ex officio* to accuse themselves and others, excommunicating and imprisoning those who from conscience refused, to the intolerable oppression of his majesty's subjects, and the overthrow of their just rights and liberties.† Numerous instances might be produced in confirmation of this melancholy statement ; but, as they are already before the public, we forbear to recapitulate the shameful barbarities.‡

* Clarendon, vol. i. p. 69, 222, 283. † Huntley's Usurpations, p. 227.

‡ Lives of the Puritans.

These despotic proceedings could not fail to throw the nation into the utmost confusion ; and the breach between the government and subjects grew wider every day. Upon the death of archbishop Abbot, bishop Laud, who was put in possession of the primacy, drove with irresistible fury, till he brought destruction upon himself, the king, and the church of England.* This prelate, when raised next to the king, aimed principally at the advancement of the hierarchy, and the destruction of all the patrons of better principles. One of his first objects was to retrench the number of lecturers and domestic chaplains, who were considered a kind of unconformable churchmen ; for the accomplishment of which, he procured an order from the king for the strict observation of the canons.

The archbishop, in the first days of his primacy, pursued that course which gave great offence to all religious people, whether in the church or out of it. A complaint having been made to lord chief justice Richardson and baron Denham, two of the judges on the western circuit, of the great inconvenience arising from public revels and profane sports on the Lord's day, they made an order, founded on various precedents, and at the request of the justices of the peace, for the suppression of these occasions of riot and debauchery ; enjoining every parish minister to publish this order three times every year in the church, and punishing some few for disobedience. The archbishop having obtained information of the measure adopted by the two learned judges, complained to the king of their invading and usurping the episcopal jurisdiction, and prevailed upon him to summon them before the council. Richardson defended what had been done, by alleging that it was at the unanimous request of the bench of justices, and by producing precedents in the two former reigns, as well as the present. But all that he could say was unavailable. He was sharply admonished, and commanded to revoke his order at the next assizes. When the lord chief justice retired from the council-chamber, he told the earl of Dorset, with tears in his eyes, " that he had been miserably shaken by the archbishop, and was likely to be choaked with his lawn sleeves."†

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 522. † Fuller, b. xi. p. 147.—Warner, vol. ii. p. 525.

The primate having humbled the venerable judge, and having taken the affair into his own hands, was resolved to complete his own purpose; therefore he prevailed on the king to republish his father's declaration for sports on the Lord's day, with this addition—"that it was out of the like *pious care for the service of God*, and for suppressing those humours which opposed the truth, and for the ease, comfort, and recreation of his well-deserving people, that he ratified his blessed father's declaration!!" This extraordinary measure was adopted, to encourage the profanation of the Lord's day, even soon after an act of parliament had passed for the reformation and better observance of that day.* "His majesty commanded all justices of assize, to see, in their respective circuits, that no man do trouble or molest any of his loyal subjects, in or for their lawful recreations, having first done their duty to God, and performed obedience to his majesty's laws; also that they take notice of this, and see it observed, as they would tender his displeasure." To complete this impious contrivance, the royal declaration was commanded to be published by an order from the bishops, through all the parish churches of their respective dioceses.† This project, instead of convincing the sober part of the nation, struck them with horror, to see themselves invited by his majesty's authority, supported by the bishops and clergy, to that which appeared to them a direct violation of the command of God. It was certainly a shocking perversion and profanation of their office, for bishops and clergymen to draw the attention of the people from the worship of God, and the practice of religion in their families, by the encouragement of public sports on the Lord's day. The court had its balls, masquerades, and plays, on the Lord's day evenings, while the people in the country were at their revels, morrice-dances, maygames, church-ales, and other kinds of diversion.

To secure the end proposed, the bishops were commanded to see that the declaration was published in all the parish churches; but the imposition of it upon the clergy, produced great terror and devastation among them for seven years. It would be endless to relate all the particulars of suspension, deprivation, and other persecutions, for refusing to read the

* Rushworth, vol. i. p. 632.

† Bp. Kennet, vol. iii. p. 66.

book of sports.* The ministers of Christ were placed in a perilous situation ; for they must either act in direct violation of Scripture and their consciences, and thus offend the Majesty of heaven, or draw down episcopal vengeance upon their own heads. Thus, the book of sports, in the hands and under the direction of the bishops, brought terror upon the clergy, and infamy upon the nation.

The archbishop believed, unhappily, that the government was so settled that nothing could shake it ; and while he had the power to aggrandize the church, he was resolved to use it. He prevailed upon the king to allow the bishops to hold their courts in their own names, without the king's seal and authority, and thus they administered their oaths of inquiry. These were deemed encroachments on the church, as well as on the rights of the subject, and proved the occasion of unspeakable discord between the ruling prelates, and the body of the people. The catholics were exempt from these severities. According to lord Clarendon, they had enjoyed a calm for many years, having obtained absolution and dispensation from the severest laws against them. They were looked upon as good subjects at court, and good neighbours in the country.†

Had the archbishop been content with being metropolitan of all England, he might have gone to his grave in peace ; but grasping at the ecclesiastical jurisdiction north of the Tweed, which was founded upon very different principles, he pulled down both upon his own head, and was buried in the ruins. The king, under the direction of Laud, adopted the mad project of imposing the English liturgy upon the kirk of Scotland ; which was soon found to be absolutely impracticable. The bishops were, on this occasion, so lifted up with the zeal of the king, and so encouraged by the archbishop, “ that they lost all temper.”‡ The attempt was resisted by the Scots ; who could not in conscience submit to this usurpation over their kirk, their country, and their souls : but king Charles and his potent primate were resolved to compel them at the point of the sword, which involved the two nations in all the horrors of war and of blood. To raise money for this protestant crusade, Laud wrote to his suffragans, and raised by the

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 526.

† Ibid. p. 527.

‡ Burnet, vol. i. p. 26.

clergy a very great sum; while the queen wrote letters to promote contributions amongst the Roman catholics, to further the same good cause: so that Laud and his clergy, together with the queen and her papists, joined to enslave or destroy the protestants of Scotland. The Scots rose in their own defence against the despotic and barbarous attempt, which proved unsuccessful.*

Who can wonder that our much-injured forefathers should now turn their eyes towards other countries, and address each other thus? "The sun shines as pleasantly on America as on England, and the Sun of Righteousness much more clearly. We are treated here in a manner which forfeits all claim upon our affection. The church of England has added to the ceremonies and habits of popery, the only marks of antichrist which were wanting, corruption of doctrine, and severe persecution of her members. Let us move whither the providence of God calls, and make that our country, which will afford us what is dearer to us than our property or our lives—the liberty of worshipping God in a way which appears to us most conducive to our eternal welfare." In twelve years of Laud's administration, not less than four thousand emigrants became planters in America; and nearly eighty divines ordained in the church of England became, during the same period, pastors of emigrant churches in the new plantations. These persecutions drained England of half a million of money, which was then an immense sum; and had the same infatuated counsels continued twelve years longer, a fourth of the moveable property in the kingdom would have been transferred to America. When it was found how peaceably and comfortably the exiles lived in their new settlements, multitudes were eager to leave, as they said, "the Egyptian bondage for the land of Goshen."†

The numerous inhumanities of the ecclesiastical courts, without serving the interest of the church, awakened universal resentment against those in power. The general emigration from the country exceedingly alarmed the king and council, and his majesty issued his proclamation, declaring, "That great numbers of his majesty's subjects were yearly transported

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 300—322.

† Mather, b. i. p. 17, 23.—Life of Baxter, p. 18.

to New England, with their families, and whole estates, *that they might be out of the reach of ecclesiastical authority*; his majesty therefore commanded, that his officers of the several ports should suffer none to pass without license from the commissioners of the plantations, and a testimonial from their minister, of their conformity to the orders and discipline of the church." To debar all *clergymen*, he further declared, "That whereas such ministers as are not conformable to the discipline and ceremonies of the church, do frequently transport themselves to the plantations, where they take liberty to nourish their factious and schismatical humours, to the hinderance of the good conformity and unity of the church; we therefore expressly command you, in his majesty's name, to suffer no clergyman to transport himself without a testimonial from the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of London."* Cruel mandate! The oppressed puritans must not be suffered to enjoy liberty and peace of conscience at home, nor be allowed to seek and enjoy it in a pagan land! These acts of injustice in a protestant country, opened the eyes of tens of thousands, and impelled them to espouse the cause of general freedom.

In the reigns of Elizabeth and James, the patrons of religious liberty had been *banished* from their beloved country; but in the reign of king Charles, they were *compelled to stay at home*, and endure these cruel oppressions, being deemed unworthy of a sanctuary in an uncultivated and dreary wilderness. Notwithstanding these despotic and contradictory measures to promote the same cause, great numbers went on board the ships in disguise, and bid a final adieu to the land of intolerance, finding a secure asylum in the new colonies. It is worthy of being recorded, that there were eight ships in the river Thames bound for New England, and filled with puritan families, among whom was OLIVER CROMWELL; who, seeing no end of the cruel oppressions in their native country, resolved to spend the rest of their days, and enjoy the blessing of religious liberty, on the other side the Atlantic. The government being apprized of their design, issued an order "to stay those ships, and to put on shore all the provisions intended for the voyage." To prevent similar attempts in future,

* Rushworth, vol. ii. p. 410.

the king prohibited all masters and owners of ships, from sending any ships with passengers to New England, without a special license from the privy-council; "because," says he, "the people of New England are *factionous* and unworthy of our support."*

It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader, that faction, schism, heresy, and similar terms of reproach, have been constantly in the mouths of tyrannizing princes and prelates, to cloak their base proceedings, and to frighten the church of God. The spirits and principles of the Colonists required time to purify them from intolerance and persecution. The precious seed of religious freedom was conveyed by individual planters, and at length richly diffused in the new world. Like an acorn planted in the earth, it took deep root in the ground; it sprung up, and became a stately oak, whose branches now overspread the whole of the United Commonwealth. There, genuine religious liberty, in principle and practice, is seen and felt equally by all; and every man pursues the religion of his own choice, without impositions or compulsions, pains, or penalties, molestations or infringements. The invaluable blessing, as the natural and undeniable right of human nature, is granted and guaranteed to every member of society, as it ought to be in every country under heaven. Thus we see the hand of a wonderful overruling Providence, in the dispersion of the pious friends of religious freedom, directing their course to the colonization of the immense new world; where the rights and liberties of the church of God, uncontaminated by human imposition, now reign in a state unprecedented since the dawn of the reformation. The government of king Charles did not pursue the puritans across the Atlantic, and fasten the church of England upon their souls in the distant wilderness; yet, extraordinary as it may seem, it actually performed this upon those who fled to Holland, and other places on the continent of Europe. Archbishop Laud drew up a number of regulations, which he submitted to the council, declaring—"That those who reside in the low countries, or in any other foreign dominions, shall admit no minister to preach to their company, but such as entirely conform to the church of En-

* Rushworth, vol. ii. p. 410.

gland, and are recommended by the lords of the council, with the advice of the archbishops of Canterbury and York. That if any minister or preacher, being his majesty's born subject, shall print, preach, or converse, to the disparagement of the doctrine or discipline of the church of England, notice shall be given to the ambassador, and by him to his majesty, that the person offending may be sent home, and answer for his misdemeanors. That the English ministers in Holland may not be permitted to hold any classical meetings, nor especially be allowed to ordain others. That all his majesty's agents beyond sea may have these instructions given them in charge, and be obliged once a year to give the board an account of their success."

The zeal of the archbishop did not stop here : but he soon after procured an order of council, to constrain all Englishmen, who had retired to Holland and other places, to observe an exact conformity to the church of England ; nor did he fail to make use of this order to its fullest extent. It will be necessary to relate one instance, reminding the reader that similar instructions were sent to other places. The archbishop sent Mr. Beaumont, a minister conformable to the doctrine and discipline established in the church of England, with the following archiepiscopal charge, to the English residing at Delph, where they were pretty numerous :—" You are to receive him with all decent and courteous usage, fitting his person and calling, and to allow him the usual ancient stipend. We are further to let you know, that it is his majesty's express command, that both you, the deputy, and all and every other merchant, that is or shall be residing in those parts beyond the seas, do conform themselves to the doctrine and discipline settled in the church of England : and that they frequent the Common-prayers with all religious duty and reverence at all times required, as well as they do sermons. That out of your company, you do yearly about Easter, as the canons prescribe, name two church-wardens, and two sidesmen, who may look to the orders of the church, and give an account according to their office. Mr. Beaumont himself is hereby to take notice, that his majesty's express pleasure and command to him is, that he do punctually keep and observe all the orders of the church of England, as they are prescribed in the canons, and

the rubrics of the liturgy. That if any of your company shall show themselves refractory to this ordinance of his majesty, (which we hope will not be) he is to certify the name of any such offender, and his offence to the *lord bishop of London* for the time being, who is to take order and give remedy accordingly. These letters are to be registered and kept by you, that they who come after may understand the care his majesty hath taken for the well ordering of your company in church affairs. You are likewise to deliver a copy of these letters to Mr. Beaumont, and to every successor of his respectively, that he and they may know what his majesty expects from them, and be the more inexcusable if they disobey.”*

These proceedings will excite the wonder and abhorrence of posterity. The episcopal jurisdiction had hitherto been confined within the boundaries of each particular diocese; but now the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of London extended their potent arms to all the cities and towns of Holland; and every association of Englishmen on the continent of Europe was brought within their spiritual cognizance and government!

The archbishop was equally vigilant in the suppression of the remaining liberty of the press; for which purpose he procured an order in the star-chamber, that none but master printers should be allowed to print, under the penalty of being set in the pillory, and suffering such other punishment as that court should appoint. That none of the master printers should print any book in divinity, law, physic, philosophy, or poetry, without a license: and that no person should reprint any book without a new license. That no merchant, bookseller, or other person, should import any printed books without giving a catalogue of them to the archbishop of Canterbury, or bishop of London. That they should not deliver or expose to sale any imported books, till the chaplains of the said archbishop or bishop, or some other person appointed, should take a view of the same, with power to *seize all that they might consider schismatical and offensive*. And that no merchant, bookseller, or any other person should print any English book beyond sea, nor import any such into this kingdom.†

* Collier, vol. ii. p. 753, 761.

† Ibid. p. 781.

In this perilous state of national affairs, the king found himself at length under the necessity, especially from his unpopular war with his Scotch subjects, to call a parliament, after an intermission of nearly *twelve* years. The house of commons, according to Clarendon, were "exceedingly disposed to please the king, and to do him service;" but instead of beginning with the supply of his wants, as the king had wished and directed, they entered upon the state of religion and grievances; with which his majesty was so much displeased, that, after sitting only three weeks, without passing a single act, he adopted a hasty resolution, and in anger dissolved the parliament.

The convocation assembled according to custom the day after the parliament, when the archbishop produced a commission under the great seal, "empowering the two houses to consult and agree upon the explanation or amendment of any canons then in force, or for making such new ones, as should be thought convenient for the government of the church." This commission was to remain in force during the present session of parliament *only*; and, from an extraordinary clause, nothing could be transacted unless the archbishop was a party in the consultation. Upon the rash dissolution of the parliament, his majesty granted a new commission for the continuance of the convocation, with which he sent this message by the secretary of state; "That it was his royal pleasure that none of the prelates or clergy should withdraw from the synod, till the affairs they had in command from the king were finished." They sat above a month, made canons, gave subsidies, enjoined oaths, and subscribed the new canons, consisting of seventeen distinct articles.

The reader will be able to form a correct judgment of these canons, from the following abstract. The first is concerning the regal power; and decrees, that the most high and sacred order of kings is of divine right, being even the ordinance of God, founded in the prime laws of nature and revelation, by which is given to them supreme power over all persons, ecclesiastical and civil; they having the care of God's church, and the power of calling and dissolving councils, national and provincial. They decree, that no person shall import, disperse, or print, any book containing Socinian doctrine, on pain of ex-

communication, and further punishment in the star-chamber. They ordain, that the canon against the papists shall be in force against the sectaries; and the clause against Socinian books, shall be in force against all books written against the doctrine and government of the church. Those who resorted to their parish churches, but did not join in the public prayers, were subjected to the same penalties as sectaries and recusants. They decree, that the following oath should be taken by all ecclesiastical persons, from the highest to the lowest:—"I do swear, that I approve the doctrine and discipline or government established in the church of England, as containing all things necessary to salvation: and that I will not endeavour by myself or any other, directly or indirectly, to bring in any popish doctrine, contrary to that which is so established: nor will I *ever give my consent* to alter the government of this church, by archbishops, bishops, deans, archdeacons, &c., as it stands now established, and as by right it ought to stand; nor yet ever to subject it to the usurpations and superstitions of the see of Rome: and all these things I do plainly and sincerely acknowledge and swear, according to the plain and common sense and understanding of the same words, without any equivocation, or mental evasion, or secret reservation whatsoever: and this I do heartily, willingly, and truly, upon the faith of a Christian. So help me God in Jesus Christ."

The canons moreover decree, that all public preachers shall declare positively and plainly twice a year, that the rites and ceremonies of the church are lawful, and to which it is the duty of all people to conform. They ordain, that no other articles of inquiry should be used at visitations, than those contained in a book drawn up for that purpose by this synod. The last canon forbids a citation from spiritual courts, except under the hand and seal of one of the judges within thirty days after the crime is committed; and until the party is convicted by two witnesses, he may purge and acquit himself by oath, without paying any fee; but this canon should not extend to schism, incontinence, misbehaviour in divine service, or obstinate nonconformity.*

These canons were generally disliked; and the oath was

* Sparrow, p. 335.—Warner, vol. ii. p. 528.

particularly offensive to the consciences of the clergy, against which they presented a petition to the king. Some objected to the oath, as contrary to the oath of supremacy ; and others complained of the *et cætera* in the middle of it. Some objected to the power claimed by the synod to impose an oath ; and many confessed, that they wished some things in the discipline of the church might have been altered ; therefore they could not swear, that they would never attempt, or consent to, any alteration in future. Notwithstanding these obstructions, the bishops were extremely forward in imposing this oath, in so much that some of them pressed it upon the clergy of their dioceses, even before the time appointed by those in power : yea, “ to my knowledge,” says my author, “ some of them enjoined them to take this oath *kneeling*, a ceremony never required in taking the oaths of allegiance and supremacy.”* Thus we see to what extravagant power these prelates aspired upon the wing of the prerogative.

An author, who lived in those times, remarks, that the practice of the prelates from the beginning of queen Elizabeth’s reign to this day, would fill a volume with lamentation, mourning, and woe. For it was their great design to hinder all further reformation ; to introduce the doctrines of popery, arminianism, and libertinism ; to maintain, and greatly increase the burden of human ceremonies ; to suppress and keep out the preaching of the word ; to silence the most faithful preachers ; to persecute the most zealous professors ; to turn all religion into pompous observances ; and to tread down the power of godliness.†

Another contemporary writer observes, that the court, during this long vacancy of parliaments, enjoyed itself in the greatest pleasure and splendour. The revels, triumphs, and princely pastimes, were so magnificently promoted through this period, that any stranger travelling through England would have believed that a kingdom looking “ so cheerfully in the face, could not be sick in any part.” The clergy, whose dependence was upon the king, were “ wholly taken up in admiration of his happy government,” which they never concealed from him, when the pulpit gave them access to him,

* Fuller, b. xi. p. 171.

† Biog. Britan. vol. iii. p. 132.

and on all public occasions this was the joyful theme of their discourse ; confidently affirming, “ that no prince in Europe was so great a friend to the church as king Charles ; that religion flourished no where but in England ; and that no reformed church but that of England, retained the face and dignity of a church !”*

The causes of disgust, which had been multiplying for upwards of thirty years, were now come to full maturity, threatening the nation with some great convulsion. The king had assumed a degree of power that was incompatible with the principles of a limited government ; and it was not possible to defend his conduct, except on maxims so odious to the nation, that they were more calculated to inflame the discontent, than to appease it. The liberty of faith and worship was, by usurpation and persecution, not suffered to exist. The religion of Christ and the laws of the land, the two great bulwarks of national security and happiness, had by the servile compliance of the bishops and judges, nearly lost their influence over the people. The court prelates fitted their principles to the unbounded prerogative of the crown ; and they both drove furiously in the same chariot, until they went violently down the precipice of ruin.

SECTION II.

Attempts to obtain greater Christian Freedom under the Parliament.

THE oppressions of king Charles and his courtiers excited continued murmurs among the people. The king had learned to govern without parliament, levying money by his own arbitrary authority. No man could call any thing his own, any longer than his majesty pleased : nor could he divulge his thoughts, by speaking or writing, without imminent danger of his liberty and estate. The perilous state of the nation, and the king’s great necessities, at length, obliged him to call a parliament, which assembled at Westminster, on November 3, 1640 ; and it appears from one of the orders of the commons,

* May’s Parliament, p. 14.

“that none should sit in their house, but such as received the communion, according to the usage of the church of England.”* The members of this parliament, according to lord Clarendon, were *all members of the church of England*, and nearly all advocates of *episcopal government*. This historian adds, that though they were not devoted to the measures of the court, they had all imaginable duty for the king, and affection for the government by law established; and undoubtedly the majority of that body were persons of wisdom and gravity, who having very plentiful fortunes, had no mind to break the peace of the kingdom, or to make any considerable alterations in the government of church or state.† It is affirmed, that no age ever produced greater men than those who sat in this parliament. They had sufficient abilities and inclinations to have rendered the king and their country happy, if England had not, through a chain of concurring events, been ripened for destruction.‡ These representations of the character and principles of the *Long Parliament*, from the most unexceptionable authorities, ought to silence the unblushing ignorance and presumption of persons of later times; who, to blacken the cause of religious emancipation, are to this day incessantly slandering, misrepresenting and stigmatizing, them by every foul name they can devise.

The oppressions which for many years had been accumulating both in church and state, awakened the cries and groans of the nation. “The first ill blood between king Charles and his subjects was occasioned by the severe proceedings of the high commission court, and the cruel censures of the star-chamber; in both of which the court clergy were allowed too much power.”§ The day of retribution, however, was now approaching, and a dreadful day it was to those who had been the occasion of the people’s sufferings. One of the first acts of this parliament was to impeach the king’s advisers, and to pass a bill for their own continuance till they should dissolve themselves. They then proceeded to make a very extensive inquiry into abuses, and to apply such remedies as, in their opinion, would heal the wounds of the nation.

Upon the examination of grievances relating to religion, one

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 533.

† Clarendon, vol. i. p. 184.

‡ Welwood, p. 45.

§ Biog. Britan. vol. i. p. 372.

of the first things which came before the house, was the passing of the canons of the late convocation, even after the dissolution of the parliament. This occasioned several very pointed speeches, both against the canons and the compilers of them ; and among others, lord Digby, who was a zealous advocate of the hierarchy, arose and said—" Does not every parliament-man's heart rise, to see the prelates usurping to themselves the grand pre-eminence of parliament, by granting subsidies under the name of benevolence, with no less a penalty to those who refuse it, than the loss of heaven and earth ; of heaven by excommunication, and of earth by deprivation, and this without redemption by appeal ? What good man can think with patience of such an ensnaring oath, as that which the new canons enjoin upon ministers, lawyers, physicians, and graduates in the university ; where, besides swearing such an impertinence, as that things necessary to salvation are contained in discipline ; swearing those to be of *divine right*, which among learned men were never pretended, as the *arch* things in our hierarchy ; also swearing not to consent to the change of that, which the state may, upon great reasons, think fit to alter ; also the bottomless perjury of an *et cætera* ; besides all this, men must swear that they swear *freely* and *voluntarily* when they are *compelled* to it ; and that they take this oath in a literal sense, for the understanding of which, no two of the makers themselves, that I have heard of, could ever agree."*

The house of commons advocated with great zeal and firmness, the cause of greater religious freedom ; and maintained, that the convocation had no power to make canons for all the people in the land, without the intervention of parliament. That most of the canons were unjust in themselves ; that they tended to increase the power of the clergy, to the prejudice of the king's authority, and injure the liberties of the people. That by these canons, the convocation assumed a power above the parliament. That the oath which they had imposed was strange, and contrary to the privileges of the parliament, and the rights of the people, constraining men to swear to things as necessary, which were alterable without any danger to religion. That supposing bishops were *jure divino*, which

* Diurnal, vol. ii. p. 9.

the church of England had never acknowledged, it could not be affirmed, that archbishops, deans, and archdeacons were of divine institution ; yet people were made to swear never to consent to the alteration of the ecclesiastical government by archbishops, bishops, deans, archdeacons, &c. That by this oath, the representatives of the nation were deprived of the power of making the least alteration of the government of the church, and even of debating on the subject. Upon these and many other reasons, the commons unanimously resolved, that the clergy of England convened in convocation or otherwise, had no power to make constitutions, canons, or acts, to bind the clergy or laity, without consent of parliament ; and that the canons of the late convocation, contained matters contrary to the king's prerogative, to the fundamental statutes of the realm, to the rights of parliament, to the property and liberty of the subject, tending to sedition and dangerous consequence.*

These were open and bold exposures, showing the determination of the commons to resist the unconstitutional power and flagrant oppressions of the convocation. The house having passed these resolutions, a committee was appointed to inquire how far the archbishop of Canterbury had been concerned in the proceedings of the reverend synod, and in the treasonable design of subverting the laws and religion of his country. Upon which his grace was accused of high treason, and his impeachment, consisting of numerous articles, was carried up to the lords. The archbishop was committed to the custody of the black rod, and then sent prisoner to the tower. He was afterwards brought to trial before the two houses, and being found guilty of high treason, was beheaded on tower-hill. This was the awful end of archbishop Laud, whose character is thus described by the eloquent pen of one who could not be tempted to exceed the bounds of truth. " When I see him confounding the cause of Christ with that of the prelate ; when I observe him persecuting with merciless rigour men of exemplary lives united with him in every point of Christian faith, and whose sole crime was conscientious opposition to the hierarchal dignity, and a regard to what they deemed to be the simplicity of the Gospel ; when I contemplate him

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 355.

on the judgment-seat, uncovering his head, and thanking God on the passing of a cruel sentence which he had himself dictated; when I see him afterwards in his closet recording with calm rancour and cold-blooded exultation the execution of the judicial barbarities; when I behold him insulting the age of the mild and liberal Abbot, and spurning him from his throne, to obtain premature possession of the metropolitan power; when I remark him ruining, with vengeance as ungrateful as it was unrelenting, the first patron of his fortunes, bishop Williams, whose hand had placed the mitre on his head—my charity must necessarily falter, and I cannot immediately decide that he stands accountable for nothing more than erroneous judgment.”*

When the parliament first assembled, petitions were sent up to the two houses from all parts of the kingdom, craving a redress of grievances. Numerous petitions were also presented by individual persons, who had been many years under close and miserable confinement; when the parliament favourably received them, released the afflicted captives, declared their imprisonments to have been illegal, and voted them to receive a recompence for damages out of the estates of their principal persecutors. They released Dr. Leighton, who had been imprisoned ten years; Mr. Smart, who had been eleven or twelve years; and Mr. Brewer, who had been fourteen years; and many others. The reading of Leighton's petition in the house of commons, giving an account of the dreadful barbarity with which he had been treated, the members were so deeply moved and affected, that they could not bear to hear it without several interruptions, with floods of tears.

To appease as much as possible the present distractions, and to consider of such grievances as were thought proper to be taken away, the house of lords appointed a committee of *accommodation*, consisting of ten earls, ten bishops, and ten barons. The design was good, and had men been at all disposed to moderation, the happiest results would have followed; but all attempts at an accommodation were blasted by the obstinacy of the bishops, and by the discovery of the plot for bringing the army up to London to dissolve the parliament.

* Symmons' Life of Milton, p. 220, 221.

This widened the distance between the king and the two houses, and soon after broke up the committee, without bringing any of their deliberations to perfection. By the exercise of moderation and mutual forbearance, the whole body of episcopacy might have been saved, and the civil war prevented: but the court prelates expected no advantage to be derived from the proceedings of the committee, being filled with groundless jealousies against those who sought to purify the church of existing corruptions. Some of them, men of hot spirits and intolerant principles, would abate nothing of the episcopal power or profit; but maintained, that to yield any thing was to give up the cause to the opposite party.* This ignorant and absurd method of reasoning has in every age been adopted by the patrons of intolerance, and the enemies of a further reformation. Such reformation they apprehend would interrupt their ease, or injure their secular interest; so that they employ all their power and influence to oppose its progress.

The parliament had not been long assembled before the sentiments of the various parties throughout the nation were clearly understood, by the multiplicity of petitions from all quarters, in which they opened their minds without equivocation or reserve. The *root* and *branch* petition was presented by the inhabitants of London and the adjacent country, complaining of existing grievances, and praying for redress as follows:

“ That whereas the government of archbishops, and lord-bishops, deans, archdeacons, &c., with their courts and ministrations, have proved prejudicial, and very dangerous to the church and commonwealth: they having themselves *formerly held*, that they have their jurisdiction or power from human authority, till of late they have claimed their calling *immediately from Christ*; which is against the laws of this kingdom, and derogatory to his majesty’s royal state. The said government is found by woeful experience, to be the principal cause and occasion of many foul evils, pressures, and grievances of a very high nature to his majesty’s subjects, in their consciences, liberties, and estates; as in the schedule of particulars hereunto annexed, may in part appear.

* Fuller, b. xi. p. 175.

“ We, therefore, most humbly pray and beseech this honourable assembly, the premises being considered, that the said government, with all its dependences, *roots*, and *branches*, may be abolished, and all the laws in their behalf made void, and that the government, according to God’s word, may be rightly placed among us; and we, your humble supplicants, as in duty bound, shall ever pray for his majesty’s long and happy reign over us, and for the prosperity of this high and honourable court of parliament.”*

The schedule annexed to this petition contained numerous charges against the episcopal government, the most painful of which were, the bishops suspending and depriving ministers for not observing human traditions in the worship of God; their discountenancing preaching; their high claim of divine right; their administering the oath *ex officio*; the exorbitant power and scandalous oppressions of the high commission.

The friends of the hierarchy, alarmed at this exposure, immediately presented a counter petition at considerable length, in favour of the established church. After some unjust reflection on the root and branch petition, the petitioners entered upon their defence of the ecclesiastical establishment, by affirming, that episcopacy was as ancient as Christianity in this kingdom: that the bishops were the chief instruments in promoting the reformation from popery; that since the reformation the times had been very *peaceable*, *happy*, and *glorious*; that many learned and godly persons would be much scandalized and troubled in conscience, if the episcopal government, which they conceived to be *apostolical*, were altered; that the government by episcopacy was not only lawful and convenient to edification, but also suitable to the policy and government of the state; that this government had been practically observed by all the Christian world from the days of the apostles to this last age; and that the episcopal government was much more conducive to piety and devotion than any other. They concluded, therefore, by earnestly praying that this government might remain unalterable; especially as “it was the most suitable, most agreeable, and every way most proportionable to the civil constitution and temper of the state.”

* Diurnal, vol. ii. p. 161.

A third petition was soon after presented to the house, called the *ministers'* petition, subscribed by seven hundred clergymen, praying for the reformation of certain irregularities and abuses in the established church. The grievances of which they complained were referred to the committee appointed to examine petitions, when the house adopted these two resolutions: "That the legislative and judicial power of bishops in the house of peers, is a great hinderance to the discharge of their spiritual function, prejudicial to the commonwealth, and fit to be taken away.—That for bishops or any other clergymen to be in the commission of the peace, or to have any judicial power in the star-chamber, or in any civil court, is a great hinderance to the discharge of their spiritual function, prejudicial to the commonwealth, and fit to be taken away; and that a bill be brought in to that purpose." The king being informed of these prompt measures, sent for the two houses to Whitehall, when he declared his readiness to concur with them in a reformation of innovations; but that he was for a reformation only of abuses, not for any specific alteration of government. He signified his willingness, that the exorbitant power and encroachments of the bishops, if there were any, should be redressed, with all other abuses; but he would not consent that their voices in parliament should be taken away. This rash measure was unparliamentary, and did neither the church nor the king the least service.*

These proceedings awakened the attention of the two houses to claim their privileges; and on the petitions already presented, with the motion for a total extirpation of episcopacy, the commons openly and boldly advocated the cause of greater freedom. Sir Henry Vane arose and said, that "the fruit of episcopacy hath been the displacing of the most godly and conscientious ministers; the vexing, punishing, and banishing out of the kingdom the most religious of all sorts and conditions, who would not comply with their superstitious inventions and ceremonies. In a word, it has turned the edge and power of their government against the very life and power of godliness, and the favour and protection of it towards all profane, scandalous, and superstitious persons, who would uphold

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 539.—Rapin, vol. ii. p. 362.

their party. It hath bred schisms and fractions among ourselves, and alienation from all the reformed churches abroad. And by the prodigious monster of the late canons, it had designed the whole nation to perpetual slavery and bondage to themselves, and their superstitious inventions. This government has been no less prejudicial to the *civil* liberties of our country, as appears by the bishops preaching up the doctrine of arbitrary power, by their encouraging the late illegal projects of raising money without parliament, by their kindling a war between England and Scotland, and blowing the flame to the utmost of their power, and by falling in with the plots and combinations that have been entered into during this present parliament."

Sir Henry concluded from these premises, that the protestant religion must always be in danger, so long as it is under such governors; nor could there be any hope of reformation in the state, while the bishops had votes in parliament: the fruit being so bad, the tree could not be good. "Let us not," said he, "then halt any longer between two opinions; but with one heart and resolution give glory to God, in complying with his providence, and with the safety and peace of the church and state, by passing the present bill."*

It must appear from the multiplicity of facts detailed in this volume, that the bishops in general had in every period zealously opposed the reformation of religion, and the enjoyment of Christian freedom, while they had constantly shown themselves the most determined patrons of superstition and intolerance. We cannot, therefore, wonder, that episcopacy appeared so odious in the eyes of the parliament, and that they were so earnest for its total abolition. Upon this subject, Mr. Bagshaw said in the commons, "I hold that episcopacy be taken into consideration as a thing which intrenches, not only upon the rights and liberties of the subject, but also upon the crown of England, in these four particulars:—It is maintained by the bishop of Exeter, in a book which he has written for this purpose, that episcopacy both in office and jurisdiction, is of *divine right*; which is directly contrary to the laws of England. They have their episcopal jurisdiction from the

* Diurnal, vol. ii. p. 18.

kings of England, and not by divine right ; and this they acknowledge themselves in the statute of 37 Hen. VIII., that they have their jurisdiction solely and only from and under the king.—It is holden at this day that episcopacy is inseparable from the crown of England ; therefore, it is now commonly said : *No bishop, no king : no mitre, no sceptre :* which I utterly deny. For it is plain, that there were kings of England long before there were bishops ; and they have a subsistence without them, and have deposed and still may depose them.—It has been said that episcopacy was a third estate in parliament ; therefore, that the king and parliament could not exist without them. This I utterly deny ; for there are three estates without them ; the king, the lords temporal, and the commons ; and I know no other. The kings of England have had many parliaments, wherein there have been no bishops, as appears from the public records.—They have holden their ecclesiastical courts in their own names, and not in the name of the king, nor by commission from him, contrary to the statute 1 Edward VI. ; and contrary to the practice of bishops Ridley, Coverdale and Poynt, who took commissions from the king for holding their ecclesiastical courts, as may be seen at this day in the rolls.—For these reasons, wherein episcopacy affects the crown of England, I am for a thorough reformation of all the abuses and grievances of episcopacy ; which reformation may be accomplished without alteration of the government of England into the form of presbytery.”*

All attempts to nourish intolerance had been countenanced by the doctrines of the higher ecclesiastics, and promoted by their practice. In this we are confirmed by the testimony of a great man, whose authority on this point will never be questioned ; since he was a firm advocate of episcopacy, and lost his life in defence of his prince and the established church. This was the lord Falkland, who stood up in the parliament, and spoke as follows :

“ He is a great stranger in Israel who knows not that this kingdom hath long laboured under many and great oppressions, both in religion and liberty ; and the principal cause of

* Diurnal, vol. ii. p. 99.

both has been some bishops and their adherents ; who, under pretence of uniformity, have brought in superstition and scandal, under the title of decency ; who have defiled our churches by adorning them, and slackened the strictness of that union which was between us and those of our religion beyond sea—an action both impolitic and ungodly. They have tithed mint and anise, and have neglected the weightier things of the law. They have been less eager on those who damn our church, than on those who, upon weak consciences, and perhaps weak reasons, only abstained from it. Nay, it hath been more dangerous for men to go to some neighbouring parish, when they had no sermon in their own, than to be obstinate and perpetual recusants. While mass has been said in security, a conventicle has been a crime ; and, which is yet more, conforming to ceremonies has been more exacted than conforming to Christianity ; and while men of scruples have been undone, others for attempts of *sodomy* have only been admonished.

“ We shall find these bishops,” adds his lordship, “ to have resembled the dog in the fable : they have neither practised themselves, nor employed those that should, nor suffered those that would. They have brought in catechising only to thrust out preaching ; cried down lectures by the name of faction, either because other men’s industry in that duty appeared a reproof to their neglect of it, or with the *intention* to have brought in darkness, that they might the easier sow their tares while it was night ; and, by this introduction of ignorance, they might the better introduce that religion which accounts it the mother of devotion. In this they have abused his majesty, as well as his people. When they had with great wisdom silenced on both parts, those opinions which have often tormented the church, and will always trouble the schools, they made use of this declaration to tie up one side, and let the other loose. The truth is, that as some ministers in our state first took away our money, and afterwards endeavoured to make our money not worth taking, by depraving it ; so these men first depressed the power of preaching, and then laboured to make it such as the harm had not been much if it had been depressed. The chief subjects of their sermons were the divine right of bishops and tithes ; the sacredness of the clergy ; the sacrilege of impropriations ; the demolishing of

puritanism ; and the building up of the prerogative. Their work, in short, has been to try how much of the papist might be brought in without popery ; and to destroy as much as they could of the Gospel, without bringing themselves in danger of being destroyed by the law. Some of them have so industriously laboured to deduce themselves from Rome, that they have given great suspicion that they desire to return thither, or at least to meet it half way. Some have evidently laboured to bring in an *English*, though not a *Roman* popery : I mean not only the outside and ornaments of it, but to make themselves equally absolute, bring in a blind dependence of the people upon the clergy, and of the clergy upon themselves ; and have opposed the papacy beyond the sea, that they might settle one in England. These men have been the betrayers of our rights and liberties.”*

Most of the leading persons in the two houses of parliament, spoke to the same effect upon the tyranny and cruelties of the late times, many of whom, at first, were zealous patrons of episcopacy, but decidedly opposed all its iniquitous oppressions. The bishops must certainly have behaved very ill, when their best friends were constrained thus to expose and censure their proceedings. The free parliamentary discussions, hitherto unknown since the reformation under queen Elizabeth, brought to light the hidden things of darkness, discovered all the secret springs of episcopal intolerance, and exhibited to the view of posterity, all the monstrous attempts and proceedings of the prerogative. The melancholy picture was drawn by eye witnesses on the very spot where the events transpired, and the representation was never contradicted or attempted to be refuted. The result could not be otherwise than favourable to religious liberty ; and by these discussions those impressions and convictions were made on all liberal minds, to which they had hitherto been total strangers. At the beginning, the members of the two houses were all members of the church of England, and nearly all advocates of episcopacy ; yet many of them undoubtedly saw cause afterwards for altering their opinions ; and in consequence of the numerous odious proceedings that were detected and brought

* Diurnal, vol. ii. p. 188.

to view, and the open and unrestrained discussions of the two houses, erroneous principles and practices were so far developed, that at least a majority of the members professedly imbibed more tolerant and Christian sentiments. They, however, betrayed one capital error. For instead of a total abolition of episcopacy, they ought only to have rescinded all statutes employed for the *establishment* of it; and having thus deprived it of the power of injuring others, guaranteed to all episcopals unrestricted religious liberty in common with all their Christian brethren.

The two houses having long with grief beheld the undue power and influence of the prelates, who had seats in the upper house of parliament, and the most prominent offices of state, a bill, as a remedy against this great national evil, was introduced by the two houses, excluding them from the lords and from all secular offices. Upon this bill, lord Say and Sele, one of his majesty's privy-council, addressed the house in these words:

“ This bill takes away their offices and places in courts of judicature, and their employments in civil affairs; which are hurtful to their consciences, by seeking or admitting things inconsistent with that function to which God hath set them apart. They are separated to a special work; and men must take heed how they misemploy things dedicated, and set apart to the service of God. They are called to preach the Gospel, and set apart to the work of the ministry; and the apostle saith: ‘ Who is sufficient for these things?’ showing that this requires the whole man, and all is too little. To seek or take other offices, therefore, which shall require them to employ their time and studies in the affairs of this world, will bring guilt upon them, being inconsistent with that to which God calls them and sets them apart. This our Saviour hath expressly prohibited, telling his apostles that they should not lord it over their brethren, nor exercise jurisdiction over them, as in the civil governments of the heathen. *They* were called lords, exercising jurisdiction as lords over them, and might lawfully do so: but to the ministers of the *Gospel*, our Saviour gives this rule, ‘ It shall not be so among you.’ If you strive for greatness, he shall be the greatest, that is the greatest servant to the rest; therefore he saith, ‘ He that putteth his

hand to the plough, and looketh back to the things of this world, is not fit for the kingdom of God.' To be thus withdrawn by an office received from men, from the discharge of that office to which God has called them, brings a woe upon them: 'Woe unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!' What does he mean? to preach once a quarter, or once a year in the king's chapel? No; but it is explained: 'Preach the word; be instant in season, and out of season. Rebuke, exhort, instruct, with all long-suffering and doctrine.' He that hath an office must attend upon his office, especially the ministry of the word.

"The practice of the apostles is answerable to the doctrine and direction of our Lord. There never were men of so great abilities and gifts as they were; yet they thought it so inconsistent with their calling to be employed in civil offices and secular affairs, that they would not admit a business far more agreeable to their calling, giving a sufficient reason for it: 'It is not reasonable that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.' Did the apostles then, who were men of extraordinary gifts, think it unreasonable to be hindered from giving themselves continually to prayer and preaching the word, by taking care of the tables of the poor; and can the bishops now think it reasonable or lawful to contend for sitting at the council-table to govern states, and to turn statesmen instead of churchmen? to sit in the highest courts of judicature, and be employed in making laws for civil government? This is, surely, much more unlawful for them, than that which the apostles rejected, as an unreasonable distraction and interruption.

"As these things are hurtful to themselves, so are they injurious to others. While the heavenly bodies keep within their own spheres, they give light and comfort to the world; but if they should break out, and fall from their regular motions, they would set the world on fire: so have these done, while they kept themselves to the work of the *ministry alone*, and gave themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word, according to the apostolic example, the world received the greatest benefit by them: they were the light and life thereof. But when by ambition they became advanced above their bre-

thren, I appeal to all who are versed in ancient or modern histories, whether they have not been the common incendiaries of the Christian world, never ceasing from contention about the precedency of their sees, excommunicating one another, drawing princes to be parties with them, and thereby casting them into bloody wars. Their ambition and intermeddling with secular and state affairs, has been the cause of shedding more Christian blood, than any thing else in the Christian world, which no man will deny that is versed in history !

“ Although the pope be cut off, there is another inconvenience no less prejudicial to the kingdom by their sitting in this house, and that is their absolute dependence upon the king—they sit here not as *freemen*. That which is requisite to freemen, is to be void of hopes and fears. He that can cast off these is a *freeman*, and will be so in this house. But it is not likely that the bishops will cast away their hopes, seeing they have greater bishoprics in expectation : and they cannot allay their fears, since their places and seats in parliament are not invested in them by any hereditary right, but annexed to their office ; so that they may be deprived of their office, and thereby of their seats, at the *king's pleasure*. They do not sit here so long as they conduct themselves *well*, but at *will* and *pleasure* ; therefore, as they were all excluded by Edward I., as long as he pleased, and laws were made *without the clergy* ; so may they be by any king at his pleasure. They must, therefore, be in absolute dependence on the crown, and will devote their votes unto it ; but how prejudicial this has been and still is to this house, I need not say.”*

The bill upon which this speech was delivered, passed the two houses, and obtained the royal assent, declaring—“ That bishops and other persons in holy orders, ought not to be entangled with secular jurisdiction, the office of the ministry being of such great importance that it will take up the whole man ; and that it is found by long experience, that their intermeddling with secular jurisdictions hath occasioned great mischief and scandal, both to church and state. His majesty, therefore, out of his religious care of the church and the souls of his people, is graciously pleased that it be enacted, and by

* Diurnal, vol. i. p. 416.

authority of this parliament, it is enacted, that no archbishop or bishop, or other person in holy orders, shall at any time have any seat or place, suffrage or voice, or exercise any power or authority in the parliaments of this realm ; nor shall be of the privy-council, or justice of the peace, or execute any temporal authority ; but shall be wholly disabled, and incapable of having, receiving, or executing any of the said offices, places, powers, or authorities.”* By this act, all the prelates of the realm, with all other ecclesiastical persons, were excluded in every respect from the office of the civil magistrate, and wholly confined within the boundaries of their own proper function.

The two houses did not stop here. They introduced two more bills, one to abolish the high commission court, the other to annihilate the star-chamber, the two great plagues of the church ; both of which obtained the royal assent.† Mr. Bagshaw, on this occasion, said—“ To make a people rich, they must have ease and justice. Ease in their consciences from the bane of superstition, from the intolerable burden of innovation in religion, and from the wracks and tortures of strange and newfangled oaths. When I have cast my eyes upon the high commission, and other ecclesiastical courts, my soul has bled for the wrong pressures which I have seen done and committed, against the king’s worthy subjects ; especially by the most monstrous abuse of the oath *ex officio* ; which, as it is now used, I can call no other than the *torture of conscience*.”‡ The high commission, says Hume, extended its jurisdiction over the whole kingdom, and over all orders of persons ; and every circumstance of its authority, and all its methods of proceeding, were contrary to the clearest principles of law and natural equity. The commissioners were empowered to administer the oath *ex officio*, by which a person was bound to answer all questions, and might thereby be obliged to accuse himself, or his most intimate friend. The fines were *discretionary*, and often occasioned the total ruin of the offender, contrary to the established laws of the kingdom. This court was a real *Inquisition* ; attended with all the *iniquities*, as

* Collier, vol. ii. p. 820.

† Scobell, part i. p. 9, 12.

‡ Diurnal, vol. ii. p. 347.

well as *cruelties*, inseparable from that tribunal.* The two-fold abolition, therefore, completely clipped the wings of the persecuting ecclesiastics, by destroying the engines of their unbounded oppressions.

Almost innumerable abuses having been presented from all parts of the kingdom, the parliament appointed a committee to draw out of them all, such kind of *remonstrance* as would give the king a lucid and extensive view of the deplorable state of the nation. The remonstrance enumerated, at considerable length, the grievances, oppressions, and unbounded acts of the prerogative, since his majesty's accession; particularly the suspension, deprivation, excommunication, and degradation of laborious, learned, and pious ministers.—The sharpness and severity of the high commission, assisted by the council-table, not much less grievous than the Romish inquisition.—The rigour of the bishops' courts in the country, whereby numbers of tradesmen had been impoverished, and driven to Holland and New England.—The advancement to ecclesiastical preferments, of those who were officious in promoting superstition, and most virulent in railing against godliness and honesty.—The design of reconciling the church of England to that of Rome.—And the late *canons* and *oath* imposed upon the clergy, under the heaviest penalties.† The remonstrance was presented to the king, with which he was much displeased; and having published an answer to it, he issued his royal proclamation, requiring an exact conformity to the religion as by law established.‡

The two houses pressed forwards in the work of reformation. The commons had already resolved, “that the Lord's day should be duly observed and sanctified; that all dancing and other sports, either before or after divine service, should be restrained; that the preaching of God's word should be promoted in all parts of the kingdom; and that all ministers should be encouraged in this good work.”§ The parliament issued an order, “that the Book of Sports should be burnt by the common hangman, in Cheapside and other public places;” which was executed by direction of the sheriffs of London and

* Hume's Hist. vol. v. p. 159.

† Rushworth, vol. v. p. 438.

‡ Ibid. p. 456.

§ Diurnal, vol. i. p. 360.—Nelson's Collec. vol. ii. p. 462.

Middlesex. By an ordinance of both houses, it was appointed, "that no person should from henceforth on the Lord's day, use or be present at any wrestling, shooting, bowling, ringing of bells for pleasure, mask, wake, church-ale, games, dancing, sports, or other pastime, under the several penalties annexed." Another ordinance was passed, for removing all monuments of superstition and idolatry, commanding all altars and tables of stone to be demolished, communion tables to be removed from the east end of the churches, the rails to be removed, the chancels to be levelled, all superstitious furniture to be removed from the communion tables, and all crosses, crucifixes, images, copes, surplices, and superstitious vestments, to be taken away and defaced.*

The parliament afterwards passed an ordinance for setting aside the Book of Common-prayer, and the establishment of the Directory, which was now republished.† But, to complete the overthrow of the hierarchy, two other ordinances were passed for abolishing the very names and titles of archbishops, bishops, and other burdensome ecclesiastical officers, and alienating their revenues for the payment of the public debts. The episcopacy and church of England were now entirely overthrown; and they remained in a state of oblivion for the space of fourteen years.

During these parliamentary proceedings, many of the right honourable senators openly and learnedly defended the rights of conscience, and the liberties of the church of God; among whom was the celebrated lord Say and Sele, already mentioned. This noble patron of religious emancipation, delivered a speech upon the bill for setting aside the Common-prayer, in which he spoke as follows:

"I do think that some set forms of prayer, by some persons, in some cases, may be lawfully used; but that which I am not satisfied in is, that a certain number of men should usurp an authority to themselves, to frame certain prayers and forms of divine service; and, when they have done this, to enjoin them under the name of a church upon all persons, to be used at all times, and on all occasions, and none other. This injunction is an usurpation of power over the churches

* Scobell, part i. p. 53, 69.

† Ibid. p. 75, 97.

of Christ, and over the gifts and graces which Christ hath given men: but which the apostles never exercised or assumed; and yet they might much better have done it, and the same reasons might have been alleged for it that are now alleged. This turns such forms, intended for direction, into superstition. This sets aside the gifts and graces which Christ hath bestowed, and rejects the exercise of them, to introduce and substitute a device of man. This injunction of forms upon all men, is a bar to the exercise of able and sufficient gifts and graces: as if, because some men need the use of crutches, all men should be prohibited the use of their legs, and enjoined to use such crutches as are provided for those who have no legs. In this, I confess, I am not satisfied.

“ There are among your lordships some bishops, men of great parts, able to offer up this worship to God, in the use of those gifts with which God has endowed them; and certainly they ought to serve him with the best of their abilities which they have received. Then let them use their own gifts; and let them openly profess that they do not account themselves bound to the use of forms. God will be worshipped with men’s best gifts and abilities; which he who officiates in his worship, is bound to use at his own peril.

“ I conceive where there are no gifts for preaching, it may be lawful and profitable to read printed sermons and homilies, and in such case they may be lawfully heard: but if, on pretence to prevent extravagant preaching, any persons should take upon them to set forth a *Book of Common Sermons*, as well as *Common Prayer*, fit for all times and occasions, and should enjoin ministers to conform to them, and use no other preaching than these *Common Sermons*; this would certainly be considered as utterly unlawful, and be protested against as a human device, in the place of God’s ordinance, and establishing the traditions of men, but making void the commandments of God. Let it be considered what difference can be found between these. Use and custom has inured us to that of prayer, but not so to this of preaching. Mr. Hales of Eaton says, ‘ that where Separation may be rightly fixed, and deservedly charged, it is certainly a great offence. But in common use now amongst us, it is no other than a theological scare-crow, wherewith the potent and prevalent party useth

to frighten and enforce those who are not of their opinions, to subscribe to their dictates, without daring to question them, or to examine them by reason or Scripture.' And this, he says, has been too common both in ancient and modern times.

“ There is a twofold separation ; one from the universal or catholic church, which cannot otherwise be made than by denying the faith ; for faith and love are the important requisites to communion : the other is, a separation from some particular church or congregation ; not upon any difference with them in matters of faith and love, but only in dislike of such corruptions in their external worship and liturgy, which they would impose on others. This is a separation, not from their persons as *Christians*, but from the *corruptions* with which they are defiled. This separation every man must make, that would keep himself from other men's sins, and not sin against his own conscience. And I must ingenuously confess, that there are many things enjoined upon all the congregations of England, which I could never see the lawfulness of, and which I can neither practise nor admit, without sinning against the light of my conscience.”*

Having traced the ecclesiastical establishment from its origin, through the different stages of its prosperity, to its downfall ; it cannot be deemed improper to inquire into some of the leading features in its character. From the numerous authentic details contained in this volume, it must appear somewhat evident, that what was usually called the church of England was at best only a sect, or a section, of the Christian church, incorporated by act of parliament. It was a political corporation, founded wholly on political enactments. Its continuance depended entirely on the will of the legislature ; and the reader must have seen, that the political rulers of the country assumed the sole power to make and unmake, to build up and pull down, the whole and every part of this political structure. Was not *persecution* another leading character in this legislative institution ? By adverting to the faithful page of history, even bigotry itself is put to the blush ; but bigotry is ashamed to examine the authentic records, and investigate the true character of the laws, the constitution, the principal offi-

* Diurnal, vol. i. p. 424.

cers, and the supreme head of the church of England, nearly all of which were combined in the common cause of intolerance and persecution. Throughout this protracted period, from the formation to the overthrow of the church, no allowance was made for the varying opinions of men, and the scrupulous consciences of any denomination of Christians : but, as Nebuchadnezzar commanded all to worship his golden image, and threatened to punish those who refused ; so all the subjects in the land were commanded to embrace the legislative religion, and to worship God according to the legislative appointment ; and all who could not in conscience obey, were followed with tremendous temporal punishments. During the whole of this period, the annals of the church afford no traces of a religious toleration, or a comprehension, or any other religion besides that which was established ; but all who could not measure their religion by the legislative standard, were deemed unworthy of legal protection, and unfit members of even *civil* society ! The church of England, therefore, during the first stages of its existence, not only destroyed the rights and liberties of Christians, but subverted the first principles of reason and Christianity, to the unspeakable disgrace of our protestant country. The excuses and apologies that are constantly made are absolutely unavailable, and all professed protestants ought to be ashamed to mention them ; unless we must apologize for the worst kind of slavery, intolerance, and cruelty ; and, till these detestable evils can be reconciled to the true spirit and principles of Christianity, let all discerning protestants leave the defence of intolerance and persecution to be the peculiar portion of catholics and Pagans.

While the parliament was pursuing these decisive measures, many important events transpired, which, in addition to those already noticed, had an immediate relation to the church of God, and the great cause of religious freedom. In the midst of the foregoing deliberations, the hearts of all good men were suddenly appalled by intelligence of the horrible massacre in Ireland. The savage papists at once rose up against the protestants ; when, according to some, they murdered *two hundred thousand* persons, in the most cruel, disgusting, and shocking manner ; while many thousands of those who escaped, came stript and almost starved to beg their bread in En-

gland.* From the computation of the catholic priests, who were actively employed in this holy service, upwards of *one hundred and fifty thousand* protestants were massacred in the space of a few months; and according to Sir John Temple, upwards of *three hundred thousand* were cruelly murdered, or ruined in some other way. The catholics, after these barbarities, spread a report, that what they had done was under the authority of king Charles.† But whether the king at all encouraged these horrid cruelties, we shall not attempt to ascertain; nevertheless it is extremely manifest, that the queen had some share in promoting this effusion of protestant blood.‡ This subject has been investigated with great candour and penetration by a respectable author, whose production is recommended to the reader's attentive perusal.§

From the first meeting of the parliament, the two houses showed a disposition to favour and protect pious and peaceable Christians of various denominations; and, while some of the members warmly recommended *universal* toleration, the measure was as warmly opposed by others. It was at this time, that the Independents sought a legal protection of their religious opinions and worship; which was vehemently opposed by many of the presbyterian clergy, especially by the renowned Edwards.

The independents, claiming the right of private judgment and liberty of conscience, continued to make known their opinions, and to attend upon the worship of God, according to their views of the New Testament. This roused hosts of violent presbyterian opponents, who wrote and preached against them with great vehemence; and, on account of this furious intolerance, and the misrepresentation of their opinions, five of their leading ministers published their "Apologetical Narration," in defence of their distinguishing sentiments. The authors of this work, who had been exiles for religion, shall speak in their own language. "They consulted the Scriptures," say they, "without prejudice; and they considered the word of God as impartially as men of flesh and blood were likely to do, in any juncture of time; the place they went to,

* Life of Baxter, p. 28.

† Rapin, vol. ii. p. 386.

‡ Burnet, vol. i. p. 40, 41.

§ Harris' Life of Charles I., p. 336—351.

the condition they were in, and the company they were with, affording no temptation to any bias." They asserted, that every particular church or congregation had sufficient power within itself, for its religious government according to the laws of Christ, and was subject to no external power or prerogative whatever. The principles on which they founded their church government, were the holy Scriptures, without regard to the opinions or inventions of men ; yet they refused to bind themselves so strictly to their present resolutions, as to have no room for future alterations upon further acquaintance with divine truth.

In the conclusion of their dedication, addressed to the parliament, they humbly prayed the two honourable houses, not to look upon them as disturbers of the public peace, but to consider them as persons who differed but little from their brethren : yea, far less than they did from what they had themselves practised only three years before. They entreated them also to have some regard to their past exile and present sufferings ; and so to allow them to continue in their native country, with the enjoyment of the ordinances of Christ, and an indulgence in some lesser differences, so long as they continued peaceable subjects.

They made the proper distinction between subjection to the authority of the magistrate in *civil* matters, and the right of private judgment in things *religious* ; the former they considered as the ordinance of God, and the latter as the invaluable birthright of man. When they were reproached as enemies to magistracy, they published the declaration of their churches, wherein they unequivocally maintained, " that as magistracy and government in general was the ordinance of God, they did not disapprove of any form of civil government, but freely acknowledged, that a kingly government, bounded by just and wholesome laws, was both allowed of God, and a good accommodation to men."

The opinions of the independents upon the great question of religious liberty, certainly differed materially from those of the presbyterians. This appeared from all the deliberations of the committee, which was appointed for the accommodation of the two jarring parties. During the discussions of this committee, Mr. Burroughs, a divine of great piety and mode-

ration, generously declared in the name of the independents, "That if their congregations might not be exempted from the coercive power of the classes ; and if they might not have liberty to govern their churches in their own way, so long as they behaved themselves peaceably towards the civil magistrate, they were resolved to suffer, or go to some part of the world, where they might enjoy their liberty. But while men think there is no way of peace but by forcing all to be of the same mind ; while they think the civil sword is an ordinance of God to determine all controversies in divinity, and that it must needs be attended with fines and imprisonment to the disobedient ; while they apprehend there is no medium between strict uniformity, and a general confusion of all things : while these sentiments prevail, there must be a base subjection of men's consciences to slavery, a suppression of much truth, and great disturbances in the Christian world."

The rigid presbyterians, on the contrary, were so enamoured with the charms of their covenant uniformity, and the divine right of presbyterianism, that they would make no abatement of the rigours which they adopted. A contemporary writer, who was no friend to the independents, affirms, that the presbyterian ministers were so insensible of their own infirmity, that they would not have those tolerated who were not only tolerable, but worthy instruments and members in the churches ; men of prudence and charity, who sought unity in things necessary, liberty in things unnecessary, and charity in all : but they could never be heard, and were considered as adversaries to the government of the church.*

The doctrine of toleration, now adopted by the liberal of all persuasions, owed its origin to the independents, whose declared averseness to all persecution and religious impositions was too opposite to the views and bigotry of the presbyterians, not to be productive of high contest and animosity. Whilst the latter exclaimed that toleration was an indulgence of the murder of souls, maintained the eternal obligation of their covenant to extirpate all heresy and schism, and menaced all their opponents with the same rigid persecution as they had themselves suffered, and of which they had so loudly com-

* Life of Baxter, p. 103.

plained ; the former argued, on the authority of the Gospel, and the dictates of reason and humanity, That every man had a right to direct his religious conscience, and interpret the Scriptures, according to his own light and apprehensions : that the doctrine of intolerance would equally justify all kinds of persecutions, Pagans against Christians, Papists against Protestants, with that which had been so lately endured from the power of episcopacy : and that the presbyterians, by preaching the doctrine of obedience in spiritual matters, passed the sentence of condemnation on their own opposition to former tyranny.*

The immortal Milton is certainly entitled to the most honourable mention, as the enlightened asserter of every man's right to worship God according to his conscience, whatever might be his religious creed. Milton was "a man in whom were illustriously combined all the qualities that could adorn, or elevate the nature to which he belonged ; a man, who at once possessed beauty of countenance, symmetry of form, elegance of manners, benevolence of temper, magnanimity and loftiness of soul, the brightest illumination of intellect, knowledge the most various and extended, and virtue that never loitered in her career nor deviated from her course."† The presbyterians having risen in power, and forgotten their principles, seized the press, and employed their own licensers, notwithstanding their former clamours against the bishops for the very same thing. Milton, therefore, boldly advanced in defence of freedom of discussion and of communication, in his work on the "Liberty of Unlicensed Printing ;" and never was a noble cause more nobly defended. It was written at the desire of several learned men, and is perhaps the best vindication, that has been published at any time or in any language, of that liberty which is the basis and support of all other liberties—the liberty of the press. Every ingenuous person, who peruses and considers this piece, must, it is said, be swayed by Milton's arguments.

This celebrated writer employed his poetic pen to expose "the new forces of conscience under the parliament," expressing himself as follows :

* Macaulay, vol. iv. p. 270.

† Symmons' Life of Milton, p. 593.

“ Because you have thrown off your prelate lord,
And with stiff vows renounc’d his liturgy,
To seize the widow’d whore plurality
From them whose sin ye envied, not abhorr’d,
Dare ye for this abjure the civil sword
To force our consciences that Christ set free,
And ride us with a classic hierarchy ?—

But we do hope to find out all your tricks,
Your plots and packing worse than those of Trent,
That so the parliament
May with their wholesome and preventive shears
Clip your phylacteries, though balk your ears,
And succour our just fears,
When they shall read this clearly in your charge,
New Presbyter is but Old Priest writ large.”*

The cause of religious freedom had, indeed, many warm and zealous advocates, who pleaded hard for toleration; but they, in general, founded their cause on erroneous principles, and rested the grant of liberty upon an improper foundation. They sought a toleration of all those, and *only* those, who agreed in the *fundamentals* of Christianity; but when they came to enumerate the fundamentals, they found themselves sorely embarrassed; as all persons must be who plead the cause of Christian liberty, without placing man's religious and civil rights on a separate basis: On the one hand, a man may be an orthodox believer, yet deserve death as a traitor to his king and country; and, on the other, a man may be a nonconformist or even a heretic, and yet be a loyal and dutiful subject, and deserve the highest civil promotion that his prince can bestow. For want of a proper attention to this important distinction, the Christian's rights and liberties have been shamefully invaded ever since the church committed fornication with the kings of the earth; and they will continue to be invaded, until men return to the first obvious principle of Christianity, even that every man has a right, and is charged by God himself, to attend to religion according to the dictates of truth, and that no man or body of men has any right to control him, being in all these things accountable to God *alone*.

The violence of presbyterian intolerance was manifest before the abolition of episcopacy, and it continued to grow and in-

* Milton's Poems, p. 265.

crease for several years. The London ministers stigmatized toleration the great *Diana* of the Independents, of which they expressed their warm detestation and abhorrence, declaring that it was unreasonable, and of dangerous consequence. They were determined to oppose and extirpate it as a root of bitterness, as contrary to godliness, as opening a door to licentiousness, and a doctrine to be rejected as the poison of souls. "We cannot dissemble," say they, "how we detest and abhor the much-endeavoured toleration. Our bowels are stirred within us; and we could even drown ourselves in tears, when we call to mind how long and sharp a travail this kingdom hath been in for many years, to bring forth the blessed fruit of a pure and perfect reformation; and now at last, after all our pangs, and dolours, and expectations, this real and thorough reformation is in danger of being strangled in the birth by a lawless toleration!"

The ministers of the country, particularly in Lancashire, openly declared their harmony with their brethren in London; and remonstrated against toleration, as putting a cup of poison into the hand of a child, or a sword into that of a madman; as letting loose madmen with firebrands in their hands, and appointing a refuge in men's consciences for the devil to fly to; and instead of providing for tender consciences, they said, "it took away all conscience!"*

The furious zeal of Edwards, was certainly the most remarkable. A specimen of his indignant spirit and language will afford the inquisitive reader some amusement, and show to what lengths of extravagance men have been hurried by outrageous bigotry and intolerance.

"If ministers will witness for truth, and against errors," says this writer, "they must set themselves against toleration, as the principal inlet to all error and heresy; for if toleration be granted, all preaching will not keep them out. If toleration be granted, the devil will be too hard for us, though we preach ever so much against them. A toleration will undo all: it will bring in scepticism in doctrine, and looseness of life, and afterwards all atheism. O! let ministers, therefore, oppose toleration, as that by which the devil would at once

* Crosby, vol. i. p. 188—192.

lay a foundation for his kingdom to all generations ; witness against it in all places ; possess the magistrate with the evil of it ; yea, and the people too, showing them how, if a toleration were granted, they would never have peace any more in their families, or ever have any command of wives, children, servants ; but they and their posterity would live in discontent and unquietness all their days. Toleration is destructive to the glory of God, and the salvation of souls ; therefore, whoever should be for toleration, ministers ought to be against it. If the parliament, city, yea all the people, were for a toleration of all sects ; yet ministers ought to present their reasons against it, preach and cry out of the evil of it, never consent to it ; but protest against it, and withstand it by all lawful ways and means within their power, venturing the loss of liberties, estates, lives, and all in that cause, and inflame us with zeal against a toleration, the great *Diana* of the sectaries.

“ A toleration,” adds this furious bigot, “ is the grand design of the devil ; his master-piece and chief engine that he works by, to uphold his tottering kingdom. It is the most compendious, ready, and sure way to destroy all religion, lay all waste, and bring in all evil. It is the most transcendent, catholic, and fundamental evil, of any that can be imagined. As original sin is the fundamental sin, having in it the seed and spawn of all sin ; so a toleration hath in it all errors and all evils. It is against the whole stream and current of Scripture, both of the Old and New Testament, both in matters of faith and manners, both general and particular commands. It overthrows all relations, political, ecclesiastical, and economical. Other evils, whether of judgment or practice, are only against some few places of Scripture ; but this is against all. This is the *Abaddon*, *Apollyon*, the destroyer of all religion, the abomination of desolation and astonishment, the liberty of perdition : therefore the devil follows it night and day, and all the devils in hell, and their instruments, are at work to promote a toleration ! !”*

Many presbyterian ministers, among whom were not a few of the assembly of divines, discovered their great zeal against toleration ; but none was so furious and malicious as Gangræna

* Gangræna, part i. p. 59, 86.

Edwards. Not content with the enjoyment of liberty themselves, and with the government greatly favouring their interests, they were continually grasping at the same tyrannical power as the bishops had formerly possessed. For this purpose, they not only obtained the privilege of licensing the press, so that nothing could be published which they disapproved ; but they exalted their presbyterian government to a *divine right*, and continually urged the parliament to establish it, with a coercive power ; and thus, by their numerous petitions, they urged the political body to become the patrons of new oppressions. The parliament had for some time been veering towards the presbyterians ; and at length an ordinance passed the two houses, for the effectual and exclusive establishment of presbyterianism. This ordinance was entitled, “ A form of Church Government to be used in the Churches of England and Ireland ;” and contained a collection of several ordinances for the establishment of the presbyterian government.

The dominant party having gained a fastness in the civil constitution, refused a toleration of those who could not bring themselves within the pale of the new political church ; and, considering them as unfit for legal protection, they used their most vigorous efforts to revive the iniquitous scenes of persecution. But among all the sects and parties, those certainly are least deserving the countenance of the state, who would persecute others, if it were in their power ; and all such ought to be considered, not only as enemies to Christianity, but as conspiring against the common interests of society. Every government that understands and appreciates its own true interests, will suppress in every sect, whether papistical, episcopal, presbyterian, independent, or any other, the spirit of domination and persecution ; which is the disturber of mankind, and the offspring of Satan.

The zealous advocates of the divine right and unalterable establishment of presbyterianism, said—“ If we tolerate one sect, we must tolerate all.” Unquestionably ; and, since it is the common benefit given them by their Creator, they have as great a right to the liberties of their consciences, as to the air they breathe, or the clothes they wear. No religious opinion is cognizable by the magistrate. The use of fines and impri-

sonments is not the way to put an end to diversity of opinions. Can Bedlam or Newgate open men's understandings, convince their consciences, reclaim them from error? Schism, error, and heresy are to be rooted out, not by the sword of the civil magistrate, but by "the sword of the Spirit, which is the *Word* of God," accompanied by sound Christian persuasion.

By the lofty behaviour of the presbyterians, and their attempts to introduce a new kind of ecclesiastical despotism, they lost the good affection of multitudes of persons, who had hitherto been firm to their interests, but who now discovered that the contest between them and the bishops was not so much for *liberty*, as for *power*; and they saw that all the religious advantage likely to be derived from the great national struggle, was only to exchange the episcopal government and oppressions, for a presbyterian vassallage and uniformity.

The prevailing opinion in these distracted times was, that it was indispensably necessary to the existence of the state, as well as to the advancement of religion, that the dominant religious sect ought to be united and incorporated with the political constitution. This was the fatal rock on which they split. Had the parliament, after abolishing episcopacy, abandoned the unrighteous system of incorporation and exclusion, and erected a government affording an equal share of protection and liberty to all denominations of Christians, so long as they continued peaceable subjects, their Christian proceedings would have been admired and applauded by all persons of liberal principles. This would have been happily realized, if they had listened to the cries and entreaties of the opposite party; but the parliament, as well as the leading clergy, could think of nothing so agreeable to their views and interests, as a domineering ecclesiastical establishment, to the exclusion even of the toleration of their brethren. It was therefore unavailable, when the best advocates of liberty recommended and solicited, "that all who profess faith in God by Jesus Christ, however differing in judgment from the doctrine, discipline, and worship publicly held forth, may be protected in the profession of their faith, and the exercise of their religion, according to their consciences; so that they abuse not this liberty to the *civil* injury of others, or the disturbance of the public peace."

The new ecclesiastical tyranny being firmly established,

we naturally look forwards to some of its renowned acts and deeds, for the advancement of religion. The presbyterians, thus exalted, persecuted all who refused conformity to their holy covenant ; and multitudes of episcopal ministers were sequestered and deprived of their benefices, and otherwise treated with great inhumanity.* An ordinance, at the same time, was passed, expressly prohibiting persons from preaching, who had not received ordination, and threatening that all offenders should receive condign punishment for their contempt. This failing to answer the end proposed, another was passed, declaring their determination “ to proceed against all such persons as should take upon them to preach or expound the Scriptures in any church, or chapel, or any other public place, except they had been ordained ; also against all such ministers, or others, as should maintain or publish, by preaching, writing, printing, or in any other way, any thing in derogation of the church government now established by the authority of both houses of parliament : and all justices of peace, sheriffs, mayors, bailiffs, and other head officers of corporations, and all officers of the *army*, are to take notice of this declaration, and by all lawful ways and means to prevent offences of this kind, and to apprehend offenders, for a due punishment to be inflicted upon them.”†

Though this act was equally intolerant, as it was antichristian, it ought to be recorded, to the public disgrace of this parliament, and as a useful lesson to posterity, that another act, entitled, “ An ordinance of the lords and commons, for punishing blasphemies and heresies,” was one of the most cruel and bloody mandates ever published in a protestant country. This law ordained, “ That all persons who shall willingly maintain and publish by preaching, writing or printing, that there is no God, or that he is not present in all places, and foreknows all things, or that he is not almighty, perfectly holy, and eternal ; or that the Father is not God, the Son is not God, or the Holy Ghost is not God ; or that they three are not one eternal God : or that shall in like manner maintain and publish, that Christ is not God equal with the Father ; or shall deny the manhood of Christ, or that the Godhead

* Bates' Elen. p. 62.

† Crosby, vol. i. p. 192—195.

and manhood of Christ are several natures ; or that the humanity of Christ is pure from all sin : or that shall maintain and publish as aforesaid, that Christ did not die, nor rise from the dead, nor is ascended bodily into heaven ; or that shall deny his death to be meritorious in behalf of believers : or that shall maintain and publish as aforesaid, that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God ; or that the holy Scripture of the Old and New Testament is not the word of God ; or that the bodies of men shall not rise from the dead ; or that there is no day of judgment : all who shall obstinately maintain and publish such error or errors shall be adjudged of *felony* ; and in case the party so offending do not abjure his said error, he shall suffer the *pains of death*, as in the *case of felony*, without *benefit of clergy* !”

This act further appointed, “ that all and every person who shall publish or maintain any of the ensuing errors, viz. that all men shall be saved ; or that man by nature hath a free-will to turn to God ; or that God may be worshipped by pictures or images ; or that the soul of man after death goeth neither to heaven nor hell, but to purgatory ; or that the soul of man dieth or sleepeth when the body is dead ; or that revelations or the workings of the Spirit are a rule of faith or Christian life ; or that man is bound to believe no more than he can by his reason comprehend ; or that the moral law of God is no rule of Christian life ; or that a believer need not repent or pray for the pardon of sins ; or that the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper, are not ordinances commanded by the word of God ; or that the baptizing of infants is unlawful, or such baptism is void, and ought to be repeated ; or that the observation of the Lord’s day, as enjoined by the ordinances and laws of this realm, is not according to the word of God ; or that it is not lawful to join in public or family prayer, or to teach children to pray ; or that the churches of England are not true churches ; or that the church government by presbytery is antichristian or unlawful ; or that the power of the civil magistrate as by law established is unlawful ; or that all use of arms is unlawful : every such person publishing or maintaining any such error, shall upon the testimony of two or more witnesses, or his own confession, be committed to prison, where he shall remain until

he shall find two sufficient sureties, that he shall not publish or maintain the said error or errors any more.”*

From the days of Constantine, the toleration of religious opinions had been treated by those in power as a damnable heresy. Revered antiquity, the parent of intolerance and oppression, would not allow the least innovation. The presbyterians, now in power, must needs tread in the steps of their numerous predecessors, and they did not fail to imitate their unhallowed example. This was one of the most intolerant, iniquitous, and scandalous acts ever published. The enumeration of the opinions condemned, is so minute and pointed, as plainly to speak this language: “Our principles form an unerring standard of truth, and not any deviation from it shall be admitted.” No decree of any council, no bull of any pope, could be more dogmatical, authoritative, or tyrannical; and few have been more sanguinary. The severity of the penalties which it denounced, as well as the mode of process which it appointed, was arbitrary and repugnant to the constitution, as well as directly opposed to the principles of justice and humanity; for it allowed neither the privilege of a jury, nor the liberty of appeal. In short, this new law was one of the most disgraceful and antichristian restraints on religious liberty, that was ever witnessed in any protestant, popish, or pagan country; and it clearly shows, that the governing presbyterians would have made a despotic and terrible use of their power, if they had possessed the sword of the civil magistrate.

The presbyterians in Scotland and in England, were alike censurable, on account of their narrow and bigoted spirit. They had not learned wisdom and moderation from the multiplied sufferings which they had endured from the episcopal party. They had been grievously oppressed for almost a century; and when they came into power, they immediately set up the divine right of presbytery, and disallowed the toleration of others. Could any thing be more absurd, than for men, who had long groaned under persecution, to practise the infamous work of persecuting their brethren? But their conduct was still more criminal, since they had been so earnestly engaged in the cause of civil and religious freedom, they ought

* Crosby, vol. i. p. 199—205.

to have discovered more just and enlarged views concerning the rights of mankind. Most of the independents of that age, who were the first in this country that promulgated the doctrine of toleration, probably owed their liberal sentiments more to the peculiarity of their situation, than to the liberality of their minds. Placed between two powerful parties, and in danger of being crushed, which soever of them became uppermost, they were constrained to plead for the indulgence of their consciences. In forming a correct judgment, therefore, of these times, every unbiassed person will be obliged to censure both the episcopalians and presbyterians, and to lament that so bigoted and persecuting a spirit pervaded the clergy of each denomination. To whatever party we belong, we should unreservedly censure the bigotry and intolerance of our ancestors, but rejoice that better principles and better practices now prevail.

That religious sentiments are not under the control of the magistrate, and not to be restrained by temporal penalties, appears from the absurd and ruinous consequences which would follow. If the magistrate establish any religion, it will certainly be his own; and if he have the right to suppress any, he will of course think it his duty to suppress that which appears to him to be erroneous. But who made the magistrate the judge of truth and error? Alas! magistrates differ as much as other men in their religious opinions. The protestant magistrate, in this case, will persecute the papists, and popish magistrate the protestants;—the athanasian will persecute the unitarian, and the unitarian the athanasian;—the episcopalian will persecute the presbyterian, and the presbyterian the episcopalian. The awful fact has, indeed, been realized by melancholy experience. But if the magistrate have any right to interfere with the religion of his subjects, let him produce his patent; and that document must be full, clear, and decisive, which affects the peace, liberty, and lives of mankind.*

Bigotry was never amiable, reasonable, or otherwise than odious; yet it is comparatively harmless as existing in individuals, who are destitute of power, or who act not by any combined influence and authority. The unnatural alliance of

* Williams's Essays, p. 88.

church and state, gives the sting to this intolerant and baneful temper; and whether the ecclesiastical rulers support the rank of bishops, or move in the more humble sphere of presbyters, we find the horrible consequences to be much the same. From all the facts here recorded, the reader will clearly perceive, that both episcopacy and presbyterianism have adopted one grand error, productive of two great evils, which generate ten thousand more. This grand error is that of making *Christianity* and *conscience* the subjects of human government. This antichristian assumption leads to *legislation* in things which exclusively pertain to God and souls; and all such legislation, whether from popes, prelates, or presbyterians, is tyrannical and oppressive. The other evil produced by persons claiming such government is the enforcement of the laws of Jesus Christ, by penal sanctions. From these two evils, making laws for conscience and executing them, or executing, by coercive measures, the laws made by Jesus Christ, have proceeded all the intolerance and cruelties of papists, episcopalians, and presbyterians; and, surely, it is high time that all such irrational, impolitical, inhuman, and antichristian proceedings were banished from the states of Christendom.

The contest between king Charles and his subjects was dreadful. The nation was involved for several years in all the horrors of civil war, which was carried on with great fury by both parties, and with various success; but victory was at length declared in favour of the parliament. The king being taken prisoner, was arraigned before a high court of justice erected for the purpose, upon a charge of high treason; and being declared guilty, he received sentence of death as a traitor, and was beheaded at Whitehall, January 30, 1648, in the forty-ninth year of his age.

Great pains have been taken to fix the odium of the war and the king's death, upon various religious parties, but without reason or success. Notwithstanding the incessant clamour of "rebellion" and "regicide," and the odious stigma, which, to this day, is cast upon certain religious denominations, by those who ought certainly to have received better information; it is an indubitable fact, that the king, with the assistance of his evil counsellors, brought the dreadful confusions upon the nation, and destruction upon his own head. This statement

is sufficiently corroborated from the foregoing facts, but especially from the unequivocal pens of learned churchmen. Queen Elizabeth and king James's arbitrary and illegal stretch of the prerogative, laid the foundation of those calamities, which, in the reign of Charles, overturned both church and state.* "James entailed upon his son, *all the miseries that befel him*; and left in the minds of his subjects those sparks of discontent, which broke out some years after into a flame of *civil war*, which ended in the ruin of king Charles, and also of the monarchy. Some of his majesty's counsellors drove so fast, that it was no wonder the wheels and chariot broke. It was in a great part owing to the indiscreet zeal of a *mitred head*, (Laud) that had got an ascendant over his master's *conscience* and *counsels*, that both the *monarchy* and *hierarchy* owed afterwards their fall.—But," our author adds, "an *immoderate desire of power*, beyond what the constitution allowed, was the rock on which he split."† These are certainly high authorities, stating the specific occasion of this awful event; yet the execution of the king was undoubtedly the act of a military faction, condemned by the great body of the people.

The religious aspect of the nation under this prince requires some discrimination, on account of the national convulsions. In the former part of his reign, as we have related from unexceptionable evidence, great numbers of pious, learned, and useful ministers, with multitudes of private Christians, were driven from their homes, to seek their bread, and spend the rest of their days, in a foreign land; so that by the numerous emigrations of persons zealous for religion, together with the tyrannical suppression of the zealous efforts of those who outbraved the storm, the state of true religion, and even the open profession of it, was reduced within very narrow bounds. While these painful depredations were committed on the church of God in this country, the persecuted hosts carried their piety and principles across the Atlantic, and planted colonies and Christian churches on the vast continent of America, where the spirit and power of religion flourishes to this day. During the latter part of this reign, episcopacy being overthrown, and presbyterianism being erected on its ruins, and the

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 497.

† Welwood, p. 20, 37, 87.

country being in a state of continual agitation, no small concern about religion was discovered in the senate, in the higher ranks of society, and among the common people. The profession of religion became more general, and the zealous energies of faithful ministers less restrained, than at any period since the rise of popery. Since bigotry and party-prejudice ran so high, there was, no doubt, much chaff mixed with the wheat, and it would now be difficult to separate the one from the other; at the same time, religious truth unfettered with old superstitions, evidently gained considerable ascendancy over the minds of the people.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE COMMONWEALTH.



SECTION I.

Impediments to Religious Emancipation continued.

ON the death of king Charles I., the government assumed the form of a COMMONWEALTH, the supreme authority being lodged in the parliament. This authority commenced its operations by an act to disinherit the prince of Wales, forbidding all persons to proclaim him king of England, on pain of high treason. The house of lords was voted to be useless; and the office of king, not only unnecessary and burdensome, but also dangerous to the liberty, safety, and welfare of the nation. The executive power was lodged in a council of state, consisting of thirty-eight persons, with full power to take care of the public administration.*

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 175.—Whitelock, p. 381.

No very material change took place, during this period, in the religious establishment of the nation. Episcopacy had been for some time abolished, when presbyterianism became the incorporated sect, as related in the foregoing chapter. Presbyterianism being made the religion of the state was soon found to be equally inimical to liberty as the prelacy; but, though formally established, it was completely crippled in its operations. The hostility of established episcopacy and presbyterianism, to the rights and privileges of Christians, of which the nation had the most convincing proof, sufficiently showed the danger of suffering any religious sect to obtain an ascendancy in the state. By such ascendancy, the dominant party, but especially the clergy, assumed too high a tone, and betrayed a strong propensity to intolerance; but this established presbyterian church was now deprived of *power*, and consequently of its *sting*.

The oaths of allegiance and supremacy were turned into an *engagement*; by which all persons who held any office in church or state were required to swear, “that they would be faithful to the commonwealth of England, as the same is now established, without king or house of lords.”* Those who refused this oath were deprived of the benefit of suing another at law, of holding any place of public trust, and even of travelling more than a certain number of miles from home. Those persons whose views accorded in general with the present form of government, took the oath without hesitation; but many of the contrary party refused, and, for a time, laboured under considerable difficulties.† In some instances, however, subscription was accepted with certain restrictions, as in the case of Dr. Conant, who subscribed on the following conditions:—“That I be not hereby understood to approve of what hath been done in order unto, or under this present government, or the government itself; nor will I be thought to condemn it: they being things above my reach, and I not knowing the grounds of the proceedings.—That I do not bind myself to do any thing contrary to the word of God.—That I do not hereby so bind myself, but that if God shall remarkably call me to submit to any other power, I may be at liberty to obey

* Whitelock, p. 433.

† Life of Baxter, part i. p. 64.

that call, notwithstanding the present engagement. In this sense, and in this sense only, I do promise to be true and faithful to the present government, as it is now established, without king or house of lords."*

The oath of fidelity to the commonwealth was now the only condition of churchmanship; consequently the terms of conformity were less rigid than at any former period. The oppressive statutes were in general relaxed or not acted upon, and the covenant was laid aside, without prescribing any other legislative qualifications. This was extremely galling to rigid presbyterians, who could see no religion except through the medium of their own established sect; and though the episcopal divines were forbidden to read the liturgy in form, they might frame their public prayers as nearly resembling it as they pleased, and, on this principle, many of them complied with the government. It is declared by no less an authority than Dr. George Bates, that numerous episcopal assemblies, where the liturgy was read, enjoyed a connivance, till they were found plotting against the government; nor would they have been denied an open toleration, if they would have given security for their peaceable behaviour, and not have meddled with the affairs of government.†

The restless presbyterians carried their darling scheme of uniformity to a very extraordinary length, a striking instance of which appeared in their behaviour to the son of the late king. The Scots having received him for their sovereign, required him to swear, "that he allowed and approved the solemn league and covenant; and that he would establish the presbyterian worship in all his dominions, observe it in his own family, and never attempt any alteration." The young king was made to sign a declaration, in which "he acknowledged his own sins, and the sins of his father's house, particularly the sin of his father in marrying into an idolatrous family; and that the blood shed in the late wars lay at his father's door! He also expressed a deep sense of his own ill education, and of his prejudice against the cause of God, confessing all the former parts of his life to have been a course of enmity against the word of God. He declared his detestation

* Biog. Britan. vol. iv. p. 64.

† Bates' Elen. part ii. p. 192.

and abhorrence of all popery, superstition, idolatry, and prelacy, and resolved not to tolerate any of them in his dominions. He said, he would account them his enemies who opposed the covenants, both of which he had taken without any sinister intention of attaining his own ends!" The young king took the covenant no less than three times, with this tremendous oath: "By the Eternal and Almighty God, who liveth and reigneth for ever, I will observe and keep all that is contained herein."*

It would certainly be difficult to find a more glaring instance of prevarication in the history of any country. But, perhaps, the prince was less blameable than the Scots, who undoubtedly knew that the abominable oaths which they extorted from him, were at war with all his feelings and sentiments. These presbyterians conducted this affair on the absurd principle on which the imposition of religious tests is usually founded, that the attestation of the judgment and conscience necessarily accompanies the subscription of the hand!

These uncatholic measures involved the nation in fresh troubles, and war was declared against the Scots. During the conflict in the north, the government, which professedly abhorred persecution, and pretended to allow liberty of conscience, commanded all ministers to observe the days of public humiliation, to fast and pray for the success of their arms, and to keep the days of public thanksgiving for their victories, upon pain of sequestration: so, says my author, "we all expected to be turned out;" but this severity was executed only in very few instances. Instead of praying and preaching for them, he adds, "I laboured to make them understand what a crime it was to force men to pray for the success of those who were violating their covenant and loyalty, and going to kill their brethren: also what it was to force men to give thanks for all their bloodshed, and to make God's ministers and ordinances vile, and serviceable to such crimes by forcing men to run to God on such errands of blood and ruin: and what it is to be such hypocrites as to persecute and cast out those who preach the Gospel, while they pretend the advancement of the Gospel, and the liberty of tender consciences: and what a

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. ii. p. 387, 391.

means it was to debauch the conscience, and leave neither tenderness nor honesty in the world, when the guides of the flocks, and preachers of the Gospel, shall be noted for swallowing down such heinous sins.”*

The house of commons, called the parliament of England, appointed that no minister should teach or preach any thing relating to the affairs of state, but only preach Christ in sincerity, and ordained penalties against those who should presume to do otherwise, restraining the liberty of the pulpit. They also made a declaration for the abolishing of tithes, but not till some other equal maintenance should be provided, which should tend to the advancement of godliness and the kingdom of Jesus Christ. In the debates upon the proper maintenance of ministers, it was proposed to be by an assessment of twelve pence in the pound upon lands, with some allowance from the deans and chapters' lands and impropriations; but the project was never brought into practice. It was enacted to abolish the name and office of dean, sub-dean, chapter, archdeacon, chancellor, canon, prebend, and all other ecclesiastical titles and offices, excepting those belonging to the two universities, and the foundations of Westminster, Winchester, and Eton; and to settle the lands and hereditaments in the hands of trustees, called contractors, to sell and dispose of them for the benefit of the public. It was also enacted, that out of the tithes belonging to the late estates of archbishops, bishops, deans, and chapters, augmentations should be made to the small livings of incumbents, so as to increase the maintenance of every minister to one hundred pounds a year.†

The parliament, to secure its reputation for justice and piety, passed an act against incest, adultery, and fornication; making the two former to be felony, and the last to be punished for the first offence with imprisonment, and for the second with death! These were very extraordinary measures, deeply stained with intolerance and cruelty, for punishing the crying sins of the times. Another act was passed against common cursing and swearing, denouncing, for the first offence, the penalty of thirty shillings on a lord, twenty on a knight or baronet, ten on an esquire, six shillings and eight

* Life of Baxter, part i. p. 67.

† Kennet, vol. iii. p. 178.

pence on a gentleman, and three shillings and four pence on every other person, and, for the second, the penalty to be doubled. Another was also passed against heresies and blasphemies, that all persons found guilty should be committed to prison for six months; and if they still persisted in their heretical and blasphemous opinions, they should be banished from the country, and, upon their return, to suffer death as in the case of felony !*

When a nation is agitated with internal commotions, especially when liberty is the object of dispute, the minds of men are roused to uncommon exertions. If there be a soul which has a spark of energy in it, that energy will be called into active operation, and will frequently give birth to ideas of the first importance to the happiness of individuals and of society, which would not have been produced in a season of repose. Oliver Cromwell, who had so much distinguished himself in the army, refused to join any party, but declared to be for the *liberty of all*. His army was an army of reasoners. They disputed about religion, every man with his Bible in his hand: and, since they had all been formerly under the compulsive yoke of intolerance, they now broke their bonds asunder, threw them indignantly away, and began to argue, that every man had a right to think for himself, without constraint of priest or king. Cromwell's soldiers had for some time argued in favour of the rights of conscience and private judgment in matters of religion; and that it was no part of the civil magistrate's office to restrain them by his control, but to confine his jurisdiction wholly to the concerns of *civil* society.†

The intrepid army being completely victorious, the English presbyterians were under painful apprehensions of the downfall of their endeared idol—presbyterianism. They had been startled by the death of the king, but were much more alarmed at the powerful ascendancy of the army. Their only hopes arose from the success of their Scotch brethren, with whose efforts they felt strongly inclined to co-operate for the settlement of prince Charles on the throne. Placed in these dubious circumstances, their zeal for their own cause induced many presbyterian ministers and others to enter into a correspon-

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 182.

† Life of Baxter, part i. p. 51, 53.

dence with the prince and the Scots, and so into a conspiracy for Charles's restoration to the crown. This plot was called *Love's plot*; because Mr. Love, a presbyterian minister, was a principal sufferer; but the vigilance of the commonwealth discovered and defeated the design. So large a confederacy could not easily be concealed from the watchful eyes of the new government, which had its spies in all places. One of the party being apprehended on suspicion, confessed, and discovered the rest of the conspirators. Upon his information, warrants were issued for apprehending the whole of the confederates; when most of them were taken and cast into prison, but several absconded and withdrew from the country. Some of the prisoners having petitioned for mercy, and promised submission to the government, were released; but Mr. Love and Mr. Gibbons having been arraigned and condemned before a new high court of justice, lost their heads on tower-hill. Thus, the mad attempt to aid the idolized ecclesiastical establishment was overthrown, and its leading projectors ruined.

The presbyterian worship and discipline by law established, greatly sunk in the estimation of the people, and in the opinion of the parliament, but especially in the affections of the conquering army: and even the kirk of Scotland, which had made high pretensions, grew into contempt.* The city of London presented a petition to the parliament, in the name of the lord-mayor, aldermen, and common council, praying, "that the precious truths of the Gospel might be preserved in purity: that the ministers thereof, being approved as learned, godly, and void of offence, might be sent forth to preach the Gospel: that their settled maintenance by law might be confirmed, and their just properties preserved: that the universities might be zealously countenanced and encouraged."

The churches of the congregational persuasion were, at the same time, humble suitors to the same authority, for liberty and protection against the domineering power of the presbyterians; on which they obtained the vote of the house, "that there should be a declaration issued for giving proper liberty to all who feared God; for preventing abuses against magistrates; for the preservation of such as feared God among

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 189.

themselves, without imposing upon others ; and for discountenancing blasphemies, damnable heresies, and licentious practice.”*

Many other addresses and petitions were presented to the parliament, praying for the general exercise of Christian freedom. Lieutenant-general Cromwell, before his embarking for Ireland, sent letters to the parliament, recommending the removal of the penal laws relating to religion ; upon which the house appointed a committee to make a report concerning a method for easing tender consciences, and an act to be introduced to appoint commissioners in every county, for the approbation of able and well qualified persons to become ministers, who could not comply with the present terms of ordination. General Fairfax and his council of officers presented a petition to the same purpose, praying “ that all penal statutes formerly made, and late ordinances, whereby many conscientious people were molested, and the propagation of the Gospel hindered, might be removed. Not that the liberty desired by them should extend to the toleration of popery, prelacy, the Book of Common-prayer, public scorn, and the contempt of God and his word : but they desired that all open acts of profaneness, drunkenness, swearing, uncleanness, and the like, might be vigorously prosecuted, and punished in all persons whatsoever.” The house thanked them for their petition, acquainting them that what they desired was already under consideration, and that their petition should hasten their proceedings with all convenient speed. The house then resolved, “ that all penal statutes and ordinances, whereby many conscientious people are much molested, and the propagation of the Gospel hindered, might be referred to the committee for bringing in an act for the ease of tender consciences.”†

In conformity to this resolution, an act was passed to take away all the penal statutes on the score of religion. The preamble sets forth, “ that divers religious and peaceable people, well-affected to the commonwealth, have not only been molested and imprisoned, but brought into danger of abjuring their country, or in case of return to suffer death as felons, by sundry acts made in former times, against persons not coming to

* Kennett, vol. iii. p. 192.

† Whitelock, p. 420.

church." It then enacts and ordains, "that all the clauses, articles, and provisos in the ensuing acts of 1 Eliz., 23 Eliz., 35 Eliz., and all and every branch, clause, article, or proviso, in any other act or ordinance of parliament, whereby any penalty or punishment is imposed, or meant to be imposed on any person, for not repairing to their respective parish churches; or for not keeping of holy days; or for not hearing Common-prayer, shall be and are hereby wholly repealed and made void. And to the end that no profane or licentious persons may take occasion by the repeal of the said laws, to neglect the performance of religious duties, it is further ordained, that all persons not having a reasonable excuse, shall on every Lord's day, and day of public thanksgiving or humiliation, resort to some place of public worship; or be present at some other place, in the practice of some religious duty of prayer or preaching, reading or expounding the Scriptures."* This ordinance afforded great relief to many conscientious persons; and the state was now at liberty to employ all such in their service as would take the oaths to the civil government, without any regard to their religious opinions.

The parliament tried various methods to reconcile the presbyterians to the present administration: persons were appointed to treat with them, and assure them of the protection of government, and of the security of their ecclesiastical preferments according to law; but these measures being found ineffectual, an order was published, prohibiting ministers meddling with state affairs in the pulpit. The celebrated Milton was appointed to write for the government, when he rallied the seditious preachers with his eloquent pen; and all other methods having failed, a committee was at length chosen to receive information against such ministers as aspersed the authority of the parliament, and an act was passed, that all such persons should be sequestered from their ecclesiastical preferments.

The presbyterians supported themselves under these hardships by their friendly alliance with the Scots, and their hope of a favourable alteration by their assistance. In the remonstrance of the general assembly of that kirk, they declared,

* Neal, vol. iv. p. 28.

that the spirit which actuated the councils of those who obstructed the work of God, despised the covenant, corrupted the truth, forced the parliament, murdered the king, changed the government, and established such an *unlimited toleration* in religion, could not be the spirit of righteousness and holiness. They, therefore, warned the Scots against joining with them. "The English," say they, "have no controversy with us, but because the kirk and state have declared against their unlawful *engagement*; because we still adhere to the covenant, and have borne our testimony against their *toleration*, and taking away the life of the king."

The parliament, soon after, published a declaration on their part, complaining of the revolt of the English and Scotch presbyterians, and of their taking part with the enemy, because their church discipline was not made the standard of reformation. "But we are still determined," say they, "not to be discouraged in our endeavours to promote the purity of religion, and the liberty of the commonwealth; and for the satisfaction of our presbyterian brethren, we declare, that we will continue all those ordinances which have been made for promoting a reformation of religion, in doctrine, worship and discipline, in their full force; and will uphold the same, in order to suppress popery, superstition, blasphemy, and all kinds of profaneness. Only we conceive ourselves obliged to take away all such acts and ordinances as are penal and coercive in matters of conscience. And because this has given so great offence, we declare as in the presence of God, that by whomsoever this liberty shall be abused, we will be ready to testify our displeasure against them, by an effectual prosecution of such offenders."*

The parliament, still as solicitous as ever about religion, devoted one day in every week to consult upon ways and means of promoting it. The inhabitants of the principality of Wales were nearly destitute of the means of Christian instruction. Their language was little understood; and their clergy were so ignorant and inattentive to their cures, that they preached scarcely one sermon in a quarter of a year. The people had neither bibles nor catechisms for their instruction. The par-

* Neal, vol. iv. p. 13.

liament, therefore, taking their case into consideration, passed an act "for the better propagation and preaching of the Gospel in Wales, and for ejecting scandalous ministers and schoolmasters." Pursuant to this measure, there were soon one hundred and fifty pious ministers in the principality, most of whom preached three or four times a week ; that in every market town was placed one, and in most two schoolmasters, able and learned university-men ; and that the tithes were all employed to the maintenance of godly ministers, the payment of taxes, the support of schoolmasters, and the fifths to the wives and children of the ejected clergy.

The commonwealth was soon very powerful, and the nation in a condition equally flourishing as under queen Elizabeth.* The form of the government was altered contrary to law, and without the consent of the people, the majority of whom were still disaffected, preferring a mixed monarchy to an absolute commonwealth. The government was a flagrant usurpation, but the administration was in the hands of the ablest men England had beheld for many years.†

Cromwell being every where triumphant, his reputation so increased, that he became the very soul of the parliament and the commonwealth. He now perceived that a continuation of the war was the contrivance of his enemies ; and that their object was to disarm him of power, and reduce him from a great general to the condition of a private gentleman. They sought to undermine his authority, and render him useless. For, says my author, though he had excellent qualities, and, by his valour and capacity, had raised the commonwealth to its present grandeur, he was still feared. The parliament was exceedingly jealous, that his credit, already too great, would become still greater, to the prejudice of the commonwealth ; therefore his ruin would have been inevitable, had he not been supported by the army. Cromwell clearly saw this, and obtained private information of a conspiracy against his life. Affairs were presently brought to such a crisis, that either the parliament must be subdued, or he must be destroyed. To decide in so critical a juncture could not long amuse an ambitious mind. Cromwell, displeased at a design to requite his

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 586.

† Ibid.

services with ingratitude like this, determined to risk every thing in order to make himself master of the parliament, rather than become their slave, who owed all their power to him.*

This was a new and delicate crisis: the civil and military powers being engaged against each other, and resolved to maintain their respective pretensions. The parliament having treated the army with insolence and contempt, and its proceedings having become as odious to the people, as they were disagreeable to the army, Cromwell believed he owed no farther regard to the men who sought his ruin. The project being concerted with the principal officers, he entered the parliament-house, with certain officers and soldiers; and, informing the members that he was come to put an end to their power, which they had so much abused, without further ceremony, commanded them to depart; upon which they were immediately dissolved. As they walked out, the officers and soldiers entered, after which he locked the door.†

This was certainly a most extraordinary measure; but what will not men do to save their own lives, or the lives of their friends? The nation, it should be recollected, was now divided into three violent parties; and it was scarcely possible to adopt expedients to satisfy them all, whose principles and interests were so opposite, as well on points of religion as on those of civil government. Force, by giving a superiority to one of them, was the only probable means of awing the other two; so that Cromwell resolved to model the government according to his own views, support his settlement by force, and disregard the chimerical project of contending for every individual in society. He clearly saw the necessity of a supreme authority capable of commanding obedience, without which the nation would have been involved in confusion, and that this authority must be supported by the army; while he no doubt believed himself more capable than any other person of managing the reins of government. I pretend not here, says Rapin, to justify all the actions of this great man, whose ability was never contested; but only to show, that, in this juncture, he could have taken no other course, without throwing the state into the most terrible confusion. Since, therefore,

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 589.

† Ibid.

as matters stood, and England was to be governed by force, was it more inconvenient to see the nation ruled by the greatest general and statesman the kingdom had for many years produced, than by a presbyterian or independent parliament, or by a king intoxicated with arbitrary power? The people had made trial of these several governments, and found them insupportable; a fourth, therefore, must be tried.*

We shall make no remarks on the sentiments of the learned historian. The only difficulty, at this crisis, arose from the supposition made by the three parties respectively, that their scheme of government was the most perfect. Cromwell disregarded their respective pretensions, and was equally reproached and censured by them. The independents were offended at him for overturning their democracy, which he had erected. The presbyterians wished him to have restored the parliament of 1648, which possessed the supreme authority of the nation. The king's party were exceedingly pleased with Cromwell's dissolution of the independent parliament, without restoring the presbyterian: but to have given them satisfaction, he must have restored the king to his throne, and the church of England to its former splendour. It was, therefore, no wonder, that the three parties were equally opposed to Cromwell's proceedings; but it is certainly questionable, whether, in such situation of public affairs, what they respectively desired was not both unjust and impracticable.

Amidst the clashing opinions and interests of different parties, the presbyterians reflected severely on the independents for asserting that uniformity ought to be pressed no further than was agreeable to the consciences of men, and conducive to general edification. "It seems to us," said the dominant sect, "that the independent brethren desire liberty, not only for themselves, but for all men." Hence they stigmatized toleration "the great Diana of the independents." And why not for all men? Is it not the natural and unalienable right of all rational creatures, who are accountable to God alone in matters of religion? Would to God that no worse a Diana had ever been idolized! The independents took the lead in recommending a principle so honourable and so just to the

* Rapin vol. ii. p. 589.

esteem and approbation of the world. This principle is one of the great bulwarks of our island ; and were Britain to erect a statue of gold in honour of the first patrons of this sentiment, she would but imperfectly discharge the debt she owes to those who have been the source of her wealth, her strength, her glory, and her happiness.

The intolerance of the presbyterians received just punishment, in the disgust with which it inspired the nation, and the ruin with which it overwhelmed their cause. The leading men in the army avowed themselves either independents, or patrons of that toleration which had been denounced as the idol of their communion. When Cromwell espoused the same cause, and nominated their principal divines to be his chaplains, as well as to fill the most important places in the universities, their standing became secure, and their triumph complete. Yet in the plenitude of their power, liberty, and not authority, was their aim. Their churches were voluntary associations supported by the influence of their principles, which constitute the only foundation of religious liberty ; while the presbyterians enjoyed the revenues appropriated by the political government to the endowment of religion.

The leading independents not only defended, but *acted* upon these generous principles. Dr. Thomas Goodwin, who was an independent, and one of the dissenting brethren in the assembly of divines, was made president of Magdalen college, Oxford, where he formed an independent church, of which the celebrated Mr. Theophilus Gale and Mr. Stephen Charnock were members. Mr. John Howe, who was then a student in the college, and known to be an independent, was asked, why he did not join them ? To which he replied, “ because I understand you lay more stress upon some peculiarities, than I approve. I can give others the liberty of their own way, without censuring them, or indulging any hard thoughts of them : but if you will admit me upon catholic principles, I will gladly unite with you.” Dr. Goodwin, with the greatest liberality of mind, cordially embraced him, and told him it should be done according to his wishes ; and signified, that he knew it would be greatly to the satisfaction and edification of all concerned : upon which he became a member of their society. The doc-

tor's ready consent is an instance of greater liberality, than he was thought by some to have possessed.*

The celebrated Dr. Owen wrote an essay on Toleration, which embraced the grand principles of religious liberty with as much precision as could be expected from an orthodox divine of that contentious age; and his work may be considered as a successful step towards a more mature and full view of the subject. In his essay on church government, published so early as the year 1646, he pleaded with great force for liberty of conscience and moderation towards men of different persuasions. His future conduct was an admirable practical comment on the liberality of his principles. When men are advanced to places of power and authority, they often discover a magisterial air, and a severity of temper towards inferiors, and become partial in the distribution of their favours: but we find a very different spirit influenced the heart, and regulated the practice of this learned divine. After he was promoted to the deanery of Christ's college, Oxford, and made vice-chancellor of the university, his wonted moderation and sweetness of disposition still adorned his public and private character. Though his views were far from presbyterianism, those livings which fell into his hands he generally gave to the presbyterians. Nor was he ever wanting to oblige the episcopalians, whom he suffered to meet quietly, about three hundred every Lord's day, opposite his own door, where they celebrated divine service according to the liturgy of the church of England; and though he was often urged to it, yet he would never give them the least disturbance; and if at any time they met with trouble or opposition, it was from other hands, and always against his will."†

A new denomination of Christians arose about this time, called Quakers—a term of reproach given them by their enemies. George Fox, who had been cast into prison at Nottingham, was afterwards convened before Gervas Bennet, Esq., one of the justices of Derby, whom he charged to tremble at the word of the Lord: for this expression the justice took occasion to stigmatize him, and his friends, *Quakers*. This new denomination abhorred the secularization of religion by the

* Life of Howe, p. 11.

† Life of Owen, p. 11.

alliance of church and state, and warmly protested against every interference of the magistrate in religion, farther than to protect the subject in the peaceable enjoyment of his principles, as a criminal encroachment on the prerogative of God and the rights of conscience.

Fox, the founder and apostle of quakerism, shared the same fate at Derby as he had done at Nottingham, and continued a considerable time in prison; when he addressed a letter to the magistrates, who had committed him, saying—"I beseech you to consider what you do, and what the commands of God require. They require you to do justice and mercy, to break every yoke, and to let the oppressed go free. But who calleth for justice, or loveth mercy, or contendeth for the truth? Is not judgment turned backward, and doth not justice stand afar off? Is not truth silenced in the streets, or can equity enter? And do not they who depart from evil, make themselves a prey? Oh! consider what you do in time, and take heed whom you imprison: for the magistrate is set 'for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.' I entreat you in time to take heed what you do: for surely the Lord will come, and will make manifest both the builders and the work. 'If it be of man, it will come to naught; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it!'"

The magistrates requiring him to enter into bonds in order to his release, he absolutely refused, and wrote to them again, exposing the unreasonable and oppressive usage he received. He said, "would you have me to be bound to my good behaviour from drunkenness, or swearing, or fighting, or adultery? The Lord hath redeemed me from all these things; and the love of God hath brought me to loathe all wantonness, blessed be his name. They who are drunkards, and fighters, and swearers, have their liberty without bonds: and you lay your law upon me, whom neither you nor any other can justly accuse of these things, praised be the Lord. I can look at no man for my liberty, but to the Lord alone, who hath the hearts of all men in his hand." He also addressed the ministers of Derby, who seem to have co-operated with the magistrates; and said, "You profess to be the ministers of Jesus Christ, but you show by your fruits what your ministry is. Every tree shows forth its fruit. The ministry of Jesus Christ

is in mercy and love, to unloose them that are bound, to bring out of bondage, and to let the captive go free. Where now is your example, if the Scriptures be your rule, to imprison men for religion? Have you any command for it from Jesus Christ? If that were in you which you profess, you would walk in their steps, who spake what you profess.”*

From all these indubitable facts, the reader will clearly perceive the powerful impediments to the progress of religious freedom, and the inveterate opposition to the general exercise of the rights of conscience. The government, professedly founded on the principles of liberty, did not understand the subject, but refused to allow every man to believe and worship God according to the convictions of his own mind. Religion was not yet completely emancipated from state politics. The spirit of bigotry and domination still blinded the minds and perverted the judgments of those in power. A learned and sensible writer remarks, that “men have been very long in discovering, and even yet seem scarcely to have discovered, that true religion is of too delicate a nature to be compelled by the coarse implements of human authority and worldly sanctions. Let the law of the land restrain vice and injustice of every kind, as ruinous to the peace and order of society, for this is its proper province; but let it not tamper with religion, by attempting to enforce its exercises and duties. These, unless they be free-will offerings, are nothing—they are worse. By such an unnatural alliance, and ill-judged aid, hypocrisy and superstition may, indeed, be greatly promoted, but genuine piety never fails to suffer.”†

SECTION II.

The Protectorship favourable to Liberal Principles.

By a due attention to approved historical records, we have examined the principles and proceedings of the parliamentary usurpation, and traced their influence on the rights of conscience, and the liberties of the country. We have briefly adverted to the critical and dangerous state of the nation, together with the total subversion of the constitution, by the supe-

* Sewel's Hist. vol. i. p. 46, 58.

† Campbell, vol. i. p. 73.

rior power of the general and his army. Not satisfied with these great changes, a new form of government was adopted in the year 1653, the general principles of which were contained in a large instrument of forty-two articles, entitled, "The Government of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland." This instrument appointed the government to be in the hands of general Oliver Cromwell, as LORD PROTECTOR, to be assisted in the public administration, by a council of twenty-one persons. A parliament was to be chosen out of the three kingdoms every three years, and not to be dissolved without their consent in less than five months. It was to consist of four hundred members for England and Wales, thirty for Scotland, and thirty for Ireland; sixty of whom should make a house.

The articles relating to religion, contained in this instrument, are—"That the Christian religion contained in the Scriptures, be held forth and recommended as the public profession of these nations; and that as soon as may be, a provision less subject to scruple and contention, and more certain than the present, be made for the encouragement and maintenance of able and painful teachers for instructing the people, for discovery and confutation of error, heresy, and whatever is contrary to sound doctrine; and that, until such provision be made, the present maintenance shall not be taken away or impeached.—That, to the public profession held forth, none shall be compelled by penalties or otherwise, but that endeavours be used to win them by sound doctrine, and the example of a good conversation.—That such as profess faith in God by Jesus Christ, though differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship, or discipline publicly held forth, shall not be restrained from, but shall be protected in, the profession of their faith, and exercise of their religion; so as they abuse not this liberty, to the civil injury of others, and to the actual disturbance of the public peace on their parts: provided this liberty be not extended to popery or prelacy, nor to such as under the profession of Christ hold forth and practise licentiousness.—That all laws, statutes, ordinances, and clauses in any law, statute and ordinance to the contrary of the aforesaid liberty, shall be esteemed as null and void."*

* Whitelock, p. 576.

The protector was installed with great magnificence, December 16, 1653, in the court of chancery, by order of the council of officers, in the presence of the lord-mayor and aldermen of London, the judges, the commissioners of the great seal, and other great officers, who were summoned to attend on the occasion. Thus did this wonderful man, by surprising management, supported only by the sword, advance himself to the supreme government of the three kingdoms, without the consent of parliament or the people. Whatever reasons might be assigned for adopting this extraordinary measure, as arising from the peculiar circumstances of the nation, or any other consideration, certain it is, that the protectorship was a most flagrant usurpation. This desperate measure was at that time thought indispensably necessary, in order to preserve the nation from fresh confusions, and from becoming a prey to the common enemy.* We shall presently see, however, that even an *usurper* could allow a larger portion of religious freedom, than a despotic monarch; and the articles above recited are certainly not deserving of any great degree of censure, though no sufficient reason can be assigned why they did not recognize equal and unrestricted liberty, even to "popery or prelacy." These articles gave great disgust to all who felt the sweets of secular and corrupt establishments, and to all the patrons of ecclesiastical power and intolerance; but they were peculiarly gratifying to the friends and patrons of human rights, forming an important step towards religious emancipation.

Bishop Kennet seems exceedingly displeased at the extensive latitude of these articles, especially, since they include no test or barrier of an ecclesiastical establishment. "How little religion was the concern," says he, "or so much as any longer the pretence of Cromwell and his council of officers, appears from hence, that in the large instrument of the government of the commonwealth committed to the protector, which was the very *magna charta* of the new constitution, there is not a word of churches, or synods, or ministers, nor any thing but the *Christian religion* in general, with liberty to all differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship, or discipline publicly set forth."† Strange, indeed, that this should displease a

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 68.

† Kennet, vol. iii. p. 193.

Christian bishop ! Without noticing the religious pretensions of “ Cromwell and his council,” it will manifestly appear to every unbiassed observer, that, notwithstanding the gross usurpation of the government, this platform was incomparably more friendly to the rights of conscience, and more favourable to the church of God, than any form of government in this country, from the days of Constantine and Theodosius, to the days of the protectorship. It formed a strong barrier against that ecclesiastical despotism and intolerance which had been practised for many generations, expressly disallowing men killing or controlling one another on account of their religion ; while it afforded every man perfect security in the unrestrained profession and propagation of his own religious opinions. His lordship ought also to have recollected, that this liberty was not intended to countenance any kind of immorality, or to encourage those who injured others in their civil rights, or to sanction those who disturbed the public peace ; but expressly prohibited every thing of the kind. Does Christianity authorize more than this ?

It will be necessary to inquire what use was made of this “ *magna charta* of the new constitution ?” Let us hear the sentiments of one who lived in those times, who was a competent judge of these matters, and who was very far from being a friend of the protector or his government. “ I perceived,” says he, “ that it was Cromwell’s design to do good in the main, and to promote the Gospel and the interest of godliness, more than any had done before him, except in those particulars which his own interest was against. It was the principal means henceforth he trusted to for his own establishment, even by *doing good* : that the people might love him, or, at least, be willing to have his government for that *good*, who were against it as it was an *usurpation*. Cromwell gave liberty to all sects among us, and did not set up any party by force ; which gave abundant advantage to the Gospel, removing the prejudices and terrors which hindered it ; especially considering that godliness had *countenance* and *reputation*, as well as *liberty* : whereas before, if it did not appear in all the fetters and formalities of the times, it was the way to common shame and ruin : hearing sermons abroad when there were none, or worse, at home ; fasting and praying together ; the strict ob-

servation of the Lord's day, and such like, went under the dangerous name of puritanism, as well as opposing the bishops and ceremonies. I know in these times you may meet with men who confidently affirm, that all religion was then trodden down, and heresy and schism were the only piety; but I give warning to all ages, by the experience of this incredible age, that they take heed how they believe those, whoever they be, who speak for the interest of their own faction and opinions, against those who were their real or supposed adversaries.

“For my part,” he adds, “I bless God who gave me even under an *usurper*, whom I opposed, such liberty and advantage to preach the Gospel with success, which I cannot have under a king, to whom I have sworn and performed true subjection and obedience; yea, which *no age since the Gospel came into this land, did before possess*, so far as I can learn from history. Sure I am, that when it became a matter of reputation and honour to be godly, it abundantly furthered the success of the ministry; yea, I shall add this also for the sake of posterity, that as much as I have said and written against licentiousness, and for the magistrate's power in religion, and though I think that land most happy whose rulers use their authority for Christ, as well as for the civil peace; yet in comparison with the rest of the world, I shall think that land happy, where the people have but *bare liberty to be as good as they are willing to be*: and if countenance and maintenance be added to *liberty*, and tolerated errors and sects be but forced to keep the peace, and not to oppose the substantial of Christianity, I shall not hereafter much fear such toleration, nor despair that truth will bear down its adversaries.”*

This is, indeed, a very high eulogium on the protector's administration from an eye witness, and an avowed adversary. The wisdom and policy of the protector appeared in nothing more than in his unwearied endeavours to make all religious parties easy. He indulged the army in their enthusiastic raptures, and sometimes joined in their prayers and sermons. He countenanced the presbyterians, by assuring them he would maintain the public ministry, and give them all due encouragement. He supported the independents, by making them his

* Life of Baxter, part i. p. 71, 87.

chaplains ; by preferring them to considerable livings in the church and universities ; and by joining them with others in the examination of those who desired admission to benefices. In point of policy the episcopalians were excepted from this unrestricted toleration, which was one of the most obnoxious features in the new constitution ; yet their assemblies obtained public connivance, and some of their clergy were indulged in the public exercise of their ministry, without the fetters of oaths, subscriptions, or engagements. The protector absolutely forbade the clergy of every class inflaming the minds of the people with political subjects, as not belonging to their profession ; and when he perceived the active presbyterians assuming too much to themselves, he never failed to mortify their arrogance. He sometimes gloried in having curbed the insolence of those, who would not suffer any to live but themselves. It was, indeed, happy for them, though unconscious of it, that their imperious discipline was disarmed of its coercive power ; while they enjoyed nearly all the liberties and privileges necessary to a religious profession.

The poet Milton, whose name has been already mentioned, was much honoured and revered. A man of his principles and celebrity could not stand an idle spectator of these great national transactions, when he again took up his pen with the zeal of an apostle of religion and of liberty. His writings breathe the most ardent spirit of freedom—the noblest enthusiasm for the welfare of the human race. They display a power of reasoning, a richness and splendour of imagination, which characterize a mind of the highest order. Milton was made Latin secretary to Cromwell, whom he urged, with the following splendid and forcible language, to the exercise and permanent security of perfect religious freedom :

“ Go on therefore, Cromwell, in your wonted magnanimity ; it fits you well. Your country’s deliverer, the founder of our liberty, and at the same time its protector, you can assume no other character more dignified or more august ; for your exploits have surpassed not merely those of kings, but those even which have been fabled of our heroes. Suffer not that liberty, which you have gained with so many hardships, so many dangers, to be violated by yourself, or in any wise impaired by others. Indeed, without our freedom, you yourself cannot be

free : for such is the order of nature, that he who forcibly seizes upon the liberty of others, is the first to lose his own—is the first to become a slave : and nothing can be more just than this. But if the patron himself of liberty, and, as it were, her tutelary genius—if he, than whom none is esteemed a more just, a holier, or a better man, should at last offer violence to her whom he has defended, this must, of necessity, be destructive and deadly, not to himself alone, but, in a manner, to the very cause of all virtue and piety. Honour and virtue themselves will appear to have faded away ; henceforward, religious faith will be narrowed ; reputation will be a poor thing indeed ; and a deeper wound than this, after that first, it would not be possible to inflict upon human kind.

“ You have taken upon you by far the heaviest burthen, which will try you thoroughly ; it will search you through and through, and lay open your inmost soul ; it will show what is the predominant disposition of your nature, what is your strength, what is your weight ; whether there is indeed in you that living piety, that faith, justice, and moderation of mind, for which we have thought that you above all others deserved, by the will of God, to be elevated to this sovereign dignity. To rule by your council three most potent nations ; to be desirous of leading the people from corrupt institutions to a better plan of life and of discipline than they had before ; to send out your anxious mind, your thoughts, to the remotest parts ; to watch, to foresee, to cavil at no toil, to despise all the blandishments of pleasure, to shun the pomp of wealth and power—these are those arduous things, in comparison of which war is a play-game ; these will drive against you like a mighty wind, and shake your steadiness ; these require a man who is upheld by divine help, who is admonished and taught by little less than divine converse. All these things and more, I doubt not, you frequently meditate upon, and revolve in your mind ; also, by what means you may give effect to those momentous considerations, and restore to us our liberty safe, and augmented.

“ It is my earnest wish that you would give permission to those who are inclined to freedom of inquiry, to publish what they have to communicate at their own peril, without the private inquisition of any magisterial censor : for nothing could

contribute so much to the growth of truth ; nor would all science be for ever measured out to us in the bushel, and be bestowed at the good pleasure of the half-learned, whether arising from their censure, their envy, their narrow-mindedness, or from their having detected superstition in others. It is my fervent wish, that you should not be afraid to listen either to truth or falsehood, of whatever description they may be ; but that you should listen the least of all to those, who never fancy themselves free, unless they deprive others of their freedom ; who labour at nothing with so much zeal and earnestness, as to enchain not the bodies only, but the consciences of their brethren ; and to introduce into church and state the worst of all tyrannies—the tyranny of their own misshapen customs and opinions.

“ I could earnestly wish,” he adds, “ that you should leave the church to itself, and have the prudence to relieve yourself and the magistrates from that burthen, which is one half, and at the same time, most remote from your province ; and that you should not suffer the two powers, the ecclesiastical and the civil, which are so totally distinct, to commit whoredom together ; and, by their intermixed and false riches, to strengthen indeed in appearance, but in reality to undermine, and at last to subvert one another. I could wish, that you would take away all power from the church—and power will never be wanting as long as there shall be money, the poison of the church, the quinsy of truth ; as long as there shall be hire for preaching the Gospel, coercively collected from those who have no disposition to pay it ; that you should cast out of the church those money-changers, who sell not doves, but the Holy Spirit himself.”*

This was a seasonable and instructive lesson to the protector. How far did he apply to himself, and improve in his own practice, these invaluable instructions of his friendly monitor ? Cromwell, it ought to be recollected, had shown himself favourable to religious liberty when he was general of the army. His liberal address to the parliament has been already noticed. When he was with the army in Scotland, in the year 1650, to moderate the turbulent kirk ministers, he ad-

* Milton's Prose Works, vol. ii. p. 434—440.

dressed them by letter in these words :—“ The ministers of England are supported, and have liberty to preach the Gospel, though not to rail, nor, under pretence thereof, to over-top the civil power, or debase it as they please. No man hath been troubled in England or Ireland for preaching the Gospel, nor has any minister been molested in Scotland since the coming of the army. Speaking the truth becomes the ministers of Christ. When ministers pretend to a glorious reformation, and lay its foundation in getting to themselves power, and can make worldly mixtures to accomplish it, such as their late agreement with the king, and hope by him to carry on their designs, they may know that the Sion promised and hoped for, will not be built with such untempered mortar. When they trust purely to the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, which is powerful to bring down strong holds, and every imagination that exalteth itself, which alone is able to square and fit the stones for the New Jerusalem ; then, and not before, and by that means and no other, shall Jerusalem the city of the Lord be built, the Sion the holy one of Israel, which shall be the praise of the whole earth.”

The Scotch ministers answered this letter, upon which Cromwell returned the following reply :—“ We look upon ministers as helpers of, not lords over, the faith of God’s people. I appeal to their consciences, whether any denying their doctrines and dissenting shall not among them incur the censure of sectary ; and what is this but to deny Christians their liberty, and assume the infallible chair ? Where do you find in Scripture that preaching is included in your function ? Though an approbation from men has order in it, and may do well ; yet he who hath not a better than that, hath none at all. I hope He who ascended up on high may give his gifts to whom he please ; and if those gifts be the seal of mission, be not envious though Eldad and Medad prophesy. You know who bids us covet earnestly the best gifts, but chiefly that we may prophesy. Which the apostle there explains to be a speaking to instruction, edification, and comfort, of which the instructed, edified, and comforted can best tell the energy and effect. If such evidence be, I say again, take heed you envy not, for your own sakes, lest you be guilty of a greater fault than Moses reproved in Joshua, for envying for his sake.

Indeed you err through the mistake of the Scriptures. Approbation is an act of conveniency in respect of order, not of necessity, to give faculty to preach the Gospel. Your pretended fear lest error should step in, is like the man that would keep all the wine out of the country lest men should get drunk. It will be found an unjust and unwise jealousy to deny a man the liberty he hath by nature, upon the supposition that he may abuse it.”*

The Scots accused Cromwell of allowing persons unordained to preach in the public congregations, to which he said—“Are you troubled that Christ is preached? Does this scandalize the reformed kirks, and Scotland in particular? Is it against the covenant? Away then with the covenant. I thought the covenant and these men would have been willing that any should speak good in the name of Christ: if not, it is no covenant of God’s providing; nor the kirk you speak so much of, the spouse of Christ.”†

Cromwell openly declared, on many public occasions, his strong disapprobation of all encroachments on the rights of conscience, recommending the exercise of forbearance and unrestricted religious liberty to all. In his speech delivered in the council-chamber at Whitehall, July 4, 1653, he said—“I beseech you, but I think I need not, have a care over the whole flock. Love the sheep; love the lambs; love all; be tender to all; cherish and countenance all, in all things that are good; and if the *poorest* Christian, the *most mistaken* Christian, shall desire to live peaceably and quietly under you: I say, if *any* shall desire but to lead a life of godliness and honesty, let him be protected.”‡

The foregoing extracts, derived from the most approved authorities, exhibit Cromwell’s views of religious emancipation in the most favourable light. He evidently wished the force of human control to cease, and every man to be left to his own unbiassed choice, in all things pertaining to religion and the worship of God. These were his sentiments and recommendations previous to his exaltation to the protectorship; and not long after his exaltation, addressing the parliament, he

* Whitelock, p. 472, 473.

† Collier, vol. ii. p. 864.

‡ Milton’s State Papers, p. 112.

said—"Is not liberty of conscience in religion a *fundamental*? So long as there is liberty for the supreme magistrate to exercise his conscience in erecting what form of church government he is satisfied he should set up, why should he not give it to others? Liberty of conscience is a *natural* right, and he that would have it, ought to give it, having liberty to settle what he likes for the public. This, indeed, hath been the vanity of our contests, that every sect saith, 'Give me liberty;' but give it him, and to the utmost of his power he will not yield it to any body else. Where then is our ingenuity? Truly that is a thing which ought to be very reciprocal. The magistrate hath his supremacy, and he may settle religion according to his conscience. I may say to you, and I can say it, all the money in the nation would not have tempted men to fight as they have done, if they had not had hopes of liberty, better than they had from episcopacy, or than would have been afforded them by a Scotch or an English presbytery, if it had been as sharp and rigid as it threatened when it was first set up. This, I say, is a *fundamental*; and it ought so to be: it is for us, and the generations to come."*

The protector thus extended liberty to all religious denominations, as the natural right of mankind, as a principle of the law of nature, and as a fundamental article of Christianity. In his speech at the dissolution of the parliament in 1654, he adverted to the same excellent sentiments, reproaching the members for their intolerance, as follows:

"When you were entered upon this government, if you had made such good and wholesome provisions for the welfare of the people of these nations, for the settling of such matters in religion as would have upheld and given countenance to a godly ministry, and yet would have given a just liberty to godly men of different judgments, men of the same faith with them whom you call the orthodox ministry in England, as it is well known the independents are, and many under the form of baptism, who are sound in the faith, only may perhaps be different in judgment in some lesser matters, yet as true Christians both looking at salvation only by faith in the blood of Christ, men professing the fear of God, having

* Sewel, vol. i. p. 145.

recourse to the name of God, as to a strong tower: I say you might have had opportunity to have settled peace and quietness amongst all professing godliness, and might have been instrumental, if not to have healed the breaches, yet to have kept the godly of all judgments from running one upon another, and by keeping them from being overrun by a common enemy, rendered them and these nations, both secure, happy, and well satisfied.

“ Are these things done, or any things towards them? Is there not yet upon the spirits of men a strange itch? Nothing will satisfy them, unless they can put their fingers upon their brethren’s consciences, to pinch them. To do this was no part of the contest we had with the common adversary; for religion was not the thing at first contended for, but God brought it to that issue at last, and gave it unto us by way of redundancy, and at last it proved to be that which was most dear to us: and wherein consisted this, more than in obtaining that liberty from the tyranny of the bishops to all species of protestants, to worship God according to their own light and consciences? For want of which, many of our brethren forsook their native countries to seek their bread from strangers, and to live in howling wildernesses; and for which, also, many who remained here were imprisoned and otherwise abused, and made the scorn of the nation.

“ How proper was it for those who were sound in the faith to labour for liberty, for just liberty, that men should not be trampled upon for their consciences? Had they not laboured very lately under the weight of persecutions? and was it fit for them to sit heavy upon others? Is it ingenuous to ask liberty, and not to give it? What greater hypocrisy, than for those who were oppressed by the bishops, to become the greatest oppressors themselves as soon as their yoke was removed? I could wish that they who call for liberty, now, also, had not too much of that spirit, if the power were in their hand. As for profane persons, blasphemers, such as preach sedition—their sins being open, makes them subjects of the magistrate’s sword, which he ought not to bear in vain.”*

It is a question of no great moment to the historian of reli-

* Whitelock, p. 614.

gious freedom, whether Cromwell adopted these admirable sentiments from principle or interest; being the sentiments of an open usurper, they are no less excellent or commendable on that account. They are worthy of the admiration and approbation of persons in all ranks of society, and would be no disgrace to princes and prelates, to nobles and statesmen in modern times. And what were the views of the majority in the parliament, whom the protector so pointedly censured? This we learn from their own proceedings. These sage statesmen passed a vote, “That without the consent of the lord protector and parliament no laws shall be made for *the restraining* of such tender consciences as differ in doctrine, worship, and discipline from the public profession, and shall not abuse this liberty, to the civil injury of others, or the disturbance of the public peace.” They, at the same time, agreed to grant liberty of conscience “to all who shall not maintain atheism, popery, prelacy, profaneness, or any damnable heresies, to be enumerated by the parliament.”*

In perfect conformity to these degrading and despotic restrictions, under the semblance of liberty and moderation, are those principles contained in their famous “petition and advice” to the protector, declaring—“That the true protestant Christian religion as it is contained in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and no other, be held forth and asserted, for the public profession of these nations; and that a confession of faith to be agreed upon by your highness and parliament, according to the rule and warrant of the Scriptures, be asserted, held forth, and recommended to the people of these nations, that none may be suffered or permitted by opprobrious words or writing, maliciously or contemptuously to revile or reproach the confession of faith to be agreed upon as aforesaid; and such who profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ his eternal Son, the true God, and in the Holy Spirit, God co-equal with the Father, and the Son, one God blessed for ever, and do acknowledge the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the revealed will and word of God, and shall in other things differ in doctrine, worship, or discipline, from the public profession held forth, en-

* Whitelock, p. 609, 610.

deavours shall be used to convince them by sound doctrine and a good conversation: but that they may not be compelled thereto by penalties, nor restrained from their profession, but protected from all injury and molestation in the profession of their faith and exercise of their religion, whilst they abuse not this liberty to the civil injury of others, or the disturbance of the public peace; so that this liberty be not extended to popery or prelacy, or to the countenance of such as publish horrible blasphemies, or practise licentiousness under the profession of Christ; and such persons as agreed not in matters of faith with the public profession aforesaid, shall not be capable of receiving the public maintenance appointed for the ministry.”*

In the debates of the parliament upon the instrument of government, it was observed, that by the thirty-seventh article all who professed faith in God by Jesus Christ should be protected in their religion. This was interpreted to mean an agreement in fundamentals. Upon which it was voted, that all should be tolerated, or indulged, who professed the *fundamentals* of Christianity; and a committee was appointed to nominate certain divines to draw up a catalogue of fundamentals to be presented to the house.† From the list of articles which they presented to the parliament, it appears that these divines intended to exclude all deists, papists, arians, socinians, antinomians, quakers, and some others. Into such difficulties and absurdities do wise and good men plunge themselves, when they openly usurp the kingly office of Jesus Christ, and attempt to restrain that liberty which is the birthright of every rational creature. It is unwarrantable presumption for any body of men to attempt to discriminate all the fundamental points of the Christian religion. But why should the civil magistrate protect only those who profess “faith in God by Jesus Christ;” If a colony of English merchants should settle among Mahometans or Chinese, should we not expect the governments of those countries to protect them in their religion, so long as they invaded no man’s property—so long as they paid due submission and obedience to the civil government under which they lived? Why then should Christians deny the same liberty to one another? Are they the only persons who may indulge in persecution?

* Whitelock, p. 660.

† Life of Baxter, part ii. p. 197.

The members of the parliament, however, were not all patrons of intolerance. Remarkably instructive was the speech of lord commissioner Fiennes, at the opening of the second session, in which he warned the house of “ the rock on which many had split, which was a spirit of imposing upon men’s consciences, where God leaves them a latitude, and would have them free. The prelates and their adherents, nay, their master and supporter, with all his posterity, have split upon it. The bloody rebels in Ireland, who would endure no religion but their own, have split upon it; and we doubt not that the prince of those satanical spirits will in due time split upon it, and be brought to the ground with his bloody inquisition. But, as God is no respecter of persons, so he is no respecter of forms; but in what form soever the spirit of imposition appears, he would testify against it. If men, though otherwise good, will turn ceremony into substance, and make the kingdom of Christ to consist in circumstances, in discipline, and in forms; if uniformity in these things dissolve unity among brethren; and if they carry their animosities to so high a degree of asperity, that if one say *Sibboleth* instead of *Shibboleth* it shall be accounted ground enough to cut his throat, though one of their brethren: if they account those as heathens, who are not under their ordinances; and all men the seed of the serpent, who are not within such a circle or of such an opinion, in vain do they protest against the persecution of God’s people, when they make the definition of *God’s people* so narrow, that their persecution is as broad as any other, and usually more fierce, because commonly edged with a sharper temper. Many of these may by God’s mercy meet together in heaven; but certainly had they power, they would not suffer one another to live on earth! Blessed be God, therefore, who in mercy to us and them, hath placed the power in such hands as to make it their business to preserve peace, and hinder them from biting and devouring one another. It is good to hold forth a certain profession of the truth, but not so as to exclude those who cannot in all points come up to it, from the privileges which belong to them as Christians, much less which belong to them as men.”*

* Whitelock, p. 669.

The protector was professedly an independent in points relating to church government; leaving every man at liberty to embrace the religion of his own voluntary choice, and refusing to persecute the people on account of their religious opinions or practice. He connived at the assemblies of those who still remained attached to the church of England; and, says Rapin, "if they were not favoured with the free and public exercise of their religion, it was because they were considered by him as royalists, always ready to form plots in the king's favour, and from whom, consequently, he had great reason to secure himself." He was averse to a union with the national establishment, considering all protestant churches as parts of the church of Christ; and, without attempting to establish independency by force and violence, he discovered on all occasions, his great zeal for the protestant religion.*

It has been affirmed by no less an authority than Burnet, that Cromwell had it in contemplation to establish a council in imitation of the congregation *de propaganda fide* at Rome, to have its watchful eye upon what passed through the whole world, in connexion with the protestant religion. A fund was to have been settled upon this council of ten thousand pounds a year, for its ordinary expenditure, besides a salary of five hundred pounds a-piece to four secretaries. This, he says, was a noble project; and adds, that Cromwell said in council, that "he hoped he should make the name of an Englishman as great as ever that of a Roman had been."† So that if his government, says Rapin, be compared with those of the last two kings, there will appear a very great disparity with regard to the glory and reputation of the English nation. James I. and Charles I. seemed to have studied to disgrace the English name, whereas Cromwell, in the space of four or five years carried the glory of his nation as far as possible, and in that respect was not inferior to Elizabeth.‡ It may be further added from the authority of Dr. George Bates, that the state of the episcopal church now seemed deplorable, "yet it cannot be denied, but that milder courses were used, than under the rigid tyranny of others that went before."§

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 600.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 77, 81.

‡ Rapin, vol. ii. p. 600.

§ Bates' Elen. part ii. p. 193.

The unrestricted liberty which the protector allowed to all denominations of Christians, could not fail to secure their esteem of his distinguished liberality and good sense, how much soever they might abhor his usurpation, or disapprove of any other part of his conduct. We will not be the apologists of Cromwell in every thing. Elated with success, and raised to a giddy eminence, he became enamoured with the bauble of empire, and, in numerous instances, betrayed a spirit utterly unworthy of his high station. Nevertheless he was the constant and determined patron of unlimited religious freedom. If persecution will sometimes make a wise man mad, a release from its iron hand will inspire sentiments of gratitude, from whatever quarter it may come. No sooner was the nation delivered from the tyranny of the bishops, than it passed under the yoke of the presbyterians—a yoke equally burdensome and grievous, till it was broken by Oliver Cromwell, who declared himself **THE FRIEND AND PATRON OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.**

The protector and his council checked the progress of intolerance, and promoted to the widest possible extent, the generous sentiments of Christian freedom. “They commonly gave out, that they could not understand what the magistrate,” as such, “had to do in matters of religion; and they thought that all men should be left to their own consciences, and that the magistrate could not interpose in such matters without ensnaring himself in the guilt of persecution.”*

The approbation of public preachers had hitherto been reserved in the hands of one denomination; but the protector observing some inconvenience in this method, and being unwilling to entrust the qualification of candidates throughout England to the presbyterians alone; who, from their deep-rooted prejudice, were under strong temptations to be partial to those of their own persuasion, contrived a middle way by joining the various parties together, and entrusting this business to certain commissioners of each denomination, men of approved abilities and integrity as any in the nation. This was done by public ordinance, the preamble of which sets forth, “that whereas, for some time there hath not been any certain course established for supplying vacant places with

* Life of Baxter, part ii. p. 193.

able and suitable persons to preach the Gospel, by reason whereof the rights and titles of patrons have been prejudiced, and many weak, scandalous, popish, and ill-affected persons have intruded themselves, or been brought in; for the remedy of which it is ordained by his highness the lord protector, by and with the consent of his council, that every person who shall, after the 25th of March, 1654, be presented, nominated, chosen, or appointed to any benefice with care of souls, or to any public lecture in England or Wales, shall, before he be admitted, be examined and approved by the persons hereafter named, to be a person, for the grace of God in him, for his holy and unblameable conversation, and for his knowledge and utterance, able and fit to preach the Gospel.”*

The commissioners appointed by this ordinance were called Tryers, composed of presbyterians, independents, and baptists. To such as were approved the commissioners gave an instrument in writing under a common seal, by virtue of which they were put in full possession of the livings to which they were nominated, as if they had been admitted by institution and induction. It was also provided, that all who presented themselves for approbation should produce a certificate signed by at least three persons of known integrity, one of whom to be a preacher of the Gospel, testifying, on their personal knowledge, the holy and good conversation of the person to be admitted; which certificate was to be registered and filed. All penalties for not subscribing or reading the articles of religion, according to 13 Eliz. were to cease and be made void.

The tryers no doubt committed some mistakes, which, in their critical situation, it was scarcely possible to avoid. We shall not attempt to justify all their proceedings. They had a difficult task to perform; they lived in times when Christian liberty was very little understood; they had to deal with men of all characters, and widely different principles in religion and politics; and those who were not approved would of course complain of improper usage. Had this power been lodged with the bishops of those times, or with the lofty presbyterians, would they not have had their *shibboleth*, for which they would have been called a spiritual inquisition? The

* Scobel, p. 336.

reader is furnished with the following character of them from the pen of an avowed adversary :

“ Because this assembly of tryers is most heavily accused and reproached by some men, I shall speak the truth of them, and suppose my word will be taken, because most of them took me for one of their boldest adversaries, and because I was known to disown their power. The truth is, that though their authority was null, and though some few over-busy and over-rigid independents among them were too severe against all arminians, and too particular in inquiring after evidences of sanctification in those whom they examined ; and somewhat too lax in their admission of unlearned and erroneous men, who favoured antinomianism and *anabaptism* ; yet, to give them their due, they did abundance of good to the church. They saved many congregations from ignorant, ungodly, drunken teachers—that sort of men who intend no more in the ministry than to say a sermon, as readers say their Common-prayers on Sunday, and all the rest of the week go with the people to the ale-house, and harden them in their sin ; and that sort of ministers who either preached against a holy life, or preached as men who were never acquainted with it, or as those who used the ministry only as a common trade : these they usually rejected, and in their stead admitted of any that were able, serious preachers, and lived a godly life, of *what tolerable opinion soever they were* ; so that though many of them were a little partial to the independents, separatists, fifth monarchy-men, and anabaptists, and against the prelatists and arminians ; yet so great was the benefit above the hurt which they brought to the church, that many thousands of souls blessed God for the faithful ministers whom they let in, and were grieved when the prelatists afterwards cast them out.”*

To humble the clergy still more, and keep them within the proper bounds of their spiritual function, the protector, by the advice of his council, published an ordinance “ for ejecting scandalous, ignorant, and insufficient ministers and school-masters.” The ordinance appointed certain commissioners for every county, to whom were joined certain assistants, and empowered any five or more to call before them any public

* Life of Baxter, part i. p. 72.

preacher, lecturer, parson, vicar, curate, or school-master, who was reputed ignorant, scandalous, insufficient, or negligent; and to receive all articles or charges that should be exhibited against them; and to proceed to the examination and determination of such offences, according to certain prescribed regulations. The party ejected might not preach or teach school in the parish whence he was ejected; but convenient time was allowed for his removal, and the *fifths* were reserved for the support of his family.

Cromwell was determined to promote complete religious emancipation. "It is certain," says a learned prelate, "that the protector was for liberty, and the utmost latitude to all parties, so far as consisted with the peace and safety of his person and government; therefore he was never jealous of any cause or sect on account of heresy or falsehood, but on his wiser accounts of political peace and quiet:—and even the prejudice he had against the episcopal party, was more for their being *royalists*, than for being of the *good old church*." Hence, when he was urged to suppress the episcopal assemblies by force, he refused, saying, "To disturb them is contrary to that liberty of conscience which he and his friends always acknowledged and defended."*

Such indeed was the protector's latitude, that he was willing to secure freedom to the Jews, who petitioned for the liberty of their religion, and for carrying on their trades in this country. Manassa Ben Israel, one of their principal rabbi's, with some others, came from Amsterdam to London for this purpose, whom the protector treated with great respect, when he summoned an assembly of divines, lawyers, and merchants, to consult upon this business. The divines were to consider it as a case of conscience; the lawyers to report how far it was consistent with the laws of England; and the merchants to give their opinion whether the measure would be to the advantage of trade and commerce. The protector was of opinion that their introduction under certain limitations would contribute to the benefit of the country; and he told the divines, that since there was a promise in the Scriptures relating to the conversion of the Jews, the preaching of the Gospel, as

* Bp. Kennet, vol. iii. p. 206.

now in England, without idolatry and superstition, might prove the means of its accomplishment: adding, that “since we pray to God for the conversion of the Jews, why should we banish them from society, as if we, who are enlightened by the bright beams of the Gospel, ought to be afraid of our religion because of the Jews?” Some of the divines contradicted and opposed these dignified sentiments with considerable “heat and anger;” yet Cromwell overruled their intolerance, and the Jews, after a banishment of three hundred and sixty-four years, were restored to the exercise of their trade, and to a toleration of their worship in England.*

Henry Cromwell, son of the protector, and lord-deputy of Ireland, discovered his enlightened liberality and correct views of religious freedom, equally with the most distinguished persons of the age. The unbiassed historian cannot forbear paying a tribute of approbation to the character and principles of this amiable young man. He was a genuine lover and firm promoter of unrestricted spiritual emancipation, by openly rejecting all impositions in religion. This honourable character he displayed on many occasions; one instance will, no doubt, be gratifying to the reader. In a letter which he addressed to general Fleetwood, he desired him to remember the evil consequence that had always followed the imposition of religion, then added:—“What! will not the laws of an imposing independent or anabaptist, be as imposing as the laws of an imposing prelate or presbyter? Dear brother, let us not fall into the sins of other men, lest we partake of their plagues. Let it be so carried, that *all the people of God*, though under *different forms*, yea, even those whom you count *without*, may enjoy their *birthright* and civil liberty, and that no one party may tread upon the neck of another. What have these sheep done,” he asks, “that their blood should be the price of our lust and ambition?”†

The protector did not confine his liberality and influence within the shores of Britain, but extended his concern to other countries. Most worthy efforts had for some time been made to promote the conversion of the Indians in America, particularly by the indefatigable Elliot and his coadjutors. This im-

* Bates' Elen. part ii. p. 211. † Thurloe's Papers, vol. vii. p. 454.

portant object met with great encouragement among the pious colonists, and the Lord inclined multitudes of respectable persons in England to espouse the cause, who made liberal contributions in its support. Cromwell warmly patronized the good work, and ordered public collections to be made throughout England, to aid the propagation of the Gospel among the poor Indians. The sum raised was considerable. In addition to other stock, lands were purchased to the annual amount of seven or eight hundred pounds; and a corporation was appointed to superintend the great work of promoting the conversion of the Indians to Christianity.*

Whilst the protector defended the various denominations of Christians, and even Jews, within the British dominions, and encouraged the propagation of Christianity among uncivilized Pagans, he extended his care and munificence to oppressed humanity in all other places. His professed zeal for the protestant religion made him the friend and patron of persecuted protestants in distant parts of the world. The dukes of Savoy had hitherto generally discovered a favourable disposition towards their Waldensian subjects, who dwelt in the valleys of Piedmont, and, in more instances than one, had protected them against the designs of their enemies. Early in the year 1655, a document was published, since known by the title of "The Order of Gastaldo," which too plainly proved that this disposition no longer existed. Gastaldo, acting under the authority of the court of Savoy, commanded all members of the reformed religion, without exception, inhabiting the valleys, to withdraw within three days of the publication of this edict, on pain of confiscation of property and death! It was also declared, that in the places to which they withdrew, the mass should be celebrated, and that all attempts to dissuade the protestants from turning papists, should be punished with death! Every effort was employed by the proscribed Waldenses, to avert the storm, but in vain. Their only remaining alternative was to abandon their houses and properties, and to retire with their wives and children, aged parents, and helpless infants, the halt, the lame, and the blind, to traverse the country through the rain and snow, encompassed with a thou-

* Life of Baxter, p. 290.

sand difficulties. A dreadful tragedy ensued. The valleys of Piedmont became the scene of rapine and blood. They resounded not as formerly, with the voice of devotional praise, but with the triumphant cries of ruffians, the shrieks of the violated, the moans of the wounded, and the groans of the dying.

The munificent efforts of Cromwell on this mournful occasion cannot fail to be highly gratifying to the generous feelings of every mind possessed of the common sympathies of humanity; as they reflect more true honour on our country, than many of those incidents in its history, to which its greatest glory is supposed principally to belong. On receiving the melancholy intelligence, he employed the pen of the celebrated Milton, and addressed the most earnest and powerful appeals to the various protestant princes of Europe, to interest themselves in favour of the persecuted Piedmontese. He appointed a day of fasting and humiliation to be observed throughout the kingdom, and patronized a national collection in aid of the sufferers, by presenting a donation of TWO THOUSAND POUNDS from his own private purse. The sum total of the collections amounted to THIRTY-EIGHT THOUSAND, TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY-ONE POUNDS, TEN SHILLINGS AND SIX-PENCE; which was certainly a great sum at that time, and gives us a favourable impression of the liberality of our forefathers.* Sir Samuel Morland, a man well qualified for so important a mission, was despatched to the courts of France and Savoy, to negotiate for the interests of the distressed Waldenses. He was the bearer of communications from the protector to those foreign courts, addressing the duke of Savoy in the following words:

“ We have received letters from several places near your dominions, informing us that the subjects of your royal highness, professing the reformed religion, have of late, by your express order and command, been required, under pain of death and the confiscation of their estates, to abandon their houses, possessions, and dwellings, within three days after the publication of that order, unless they would pledge themselves to relinquish their religious profession, and become catholics within twenty days! And that when, with all becoming hu-

* Jones' Waldenses, p. 543.

military, they addressed themselves to your royal highness, petitioning for a revocation of that order, and a reception to former favour, with a continuance of such liberties as were granted them by your most serene predecessors, a part of your army fell upon them, most cruelly massacred many, imprisoned others, banishing the rest into desert places and mountains covered with snow, where some hundreds of families are reduced to such extremity, that it is to be feared they will all miserably perish in a short time with hunger and cold.

“ When intelligence was first brought us that a calamity so awful had befallen those most miserable people, it was impossible for us not to feel the deepest sorrow and compassion. For, as we are, not only by the ties of humanity, but also by religious fellowship and fraternal relation, united to them, we conceived we could neither satisfy our own minds, nor discharge our duty to God, nor the obligations of brotherly kindness and charity, as professors of the same faith, if, while deeply sympathizing with our afflicted brethren, we should fail to use every endeavour that was within our reach, to succour them under so many unexpected miseries.

“ We, in the first place, therefore, most earnestly desire and entreat your highness that you would reconsider the acts and ordinances of your most serene predecessors, and the indulgences which were by them granted from time immemorial, and ratified to their subjects of the valleys. In granting and confirming which, as on the one hand they unquestionably did that which in itself was well-pleasing to God, who intends that the law and liberty of conscience shall remain wholly in his own power ; so, on the other, it cannot be doubted but that they had a respect also to the merit of their subjects, whom they had always found faithful in war and obedient in time of peace. As your serene highness has imitated the example of your predecessors, in all other things that have been so graciously and gloriously achieved by them, so we beseech you again and again that you would abrogate this edict, and any other that has been issued for the disquieting of your subjects on account of their religion ; that you would restore them to their native homes, and the possession of their properties ; that you would confirm to them their ancient rights and liberties, cause reparation to be made to them for the injuries they have

sustained, and adopt such means as may put an effectual stop to their vexatious proceedings. In doing this, your royal highness will perform what is acceptable to God, comfort and revive these miserable and distressed people, and give satisfaction to all your neighbours professing the reformed religion, and especially of ourselves, who shall regard your favour and clemency towards them as the effect and fruit of our mediation, which we shall consider ourselves bound to requite by a return of every good office, while it will also be the means of not only laying a foundation for our good correspondence and friendship, but also of increasing it between this commonwealth and your dominions. This we promise ourselves from your justice and clemency: whereunto we desire God to incline your heart and mind, and so we sincerely pray that he would confer on you and on your people peace and truth, and that he would prosper you in all your affairs.”*

It must afford peculiar pleasure to every benevolent mind to reflect on the great interest that was discovered for the fate of the oppressed Waldenses by nearly all the protestant states of Europe, which addressed letters to the duke of Savoy, declaring their abhorrence of his sanguinary massacre, and interceding for his persecuted subjects. The annals of Europe scarcely afford a similar instance of cordial and mutual co-operation, among the different nations, as, at this juncture, appeared in behalf of these poor persecuted people. Their case was clearly understood, and generally and deeply felt. It was purely a case of persecution for religion and conscience; and, considering all the circumstances, it was an instance of such atrocious and brutal outrage, as the world had seldom witnessed. It came home to the breasts of all the protestants in Europe, and they took a lively interest to bring it to a termination; when a treaty was at length obtained, though it was afterwards shamefully violated by the barbarous catholics.†

The reader has been already reminded of the rise of the quakers; whose principles and conduct were in some respects so novel and so contrary to the notions which then prevailed, that they often provoked the intolerance of the magistrates. They, however, inculcated submission to the laws in all cases

* Jones, p. 534.

† Ibid. p. 546—555.

wherein conscience was not violated. They held, that as Christ's kingdom was not of this world, it was not the business of the civil magistrate to interfere in matters of religion; but to maintain the external peace and good order of society. They required no subscription to articles of religion, but rejected all human confessions of faith, claiming perfect liberty of worship. In their letter to the protector, they complained, that though there were no penal laws then in force, constraining men to comply with the established religion; yet their friends were imprisoned for refusing to take an oath; for not paying tithes; for preaching in the open markets, and other public places; while some were whipped as vagabonds, and as a reward for their plain speeches to the magistrates.* Like most other sects, their infancy was stained with some trivial improprieties, which at this time were magnified to great enormities, and were supposed to justify the injuries heaped upon them, by those who had not learned the true doctrine of Christian liberty. The protector worthily interposed in their favour, and ordered many of them to be released from prison.†

Towards the close of this period, the independents petitioned Cromwell for liberty to hold a synod, in order to prepare and publish to the world a uniform confession of their faith. They were become a considerable body, their churches being greatly increased both in town and country, by the numerous additions of substantial persons; but they had never agreed to adopt any standard of faith or discipline. The presbyterians had urged them to this measure; as their brethren in New England had done ten years ago; nor were the English independents insensible of its advantages. Hitherto, say they, "there have been no associations of our churches, no meetings of our ministers to promote the common interest: our churches are like so many ships launched singly, and sailing alone in the vast ocean of these tumultuous times, exposed to every wind of doctrine; under no other conduct than the word and Spirit, and their particular and principal brethren, without associations among themselves, or so much as holding out a common light to others, by which to know where they are." To remedy these inconveniences, some of their divines had pro-

* Sewel, vol. i. p. 141.

† Gough, vol. i. p. 179.

posed a general and friendly correspondence among the churches; and, as nearly all sects of Christians had published a confession of their faith, they apprehended that a similar measure from them might be no unacceptable service. On these grounds they petitioned the protector for liberty to assemble; and, though opposed by certain persons at court, as tending to promote a separation between them and the presbyterians, the protector gave his consent.

The consultations having terminated, they published "A Declaration of their Faith and Order;" at the end of which they treat of "the institution of churches, and the order appointed in them by Jesus Christ," containing the following liberal and dignified sentiments:—"That every particular society of visible professors agreeing to walk together in the faith and order of the Gospel is a complete church, and has full power within itself to elect and ordain all church officers, to exclude all offenders, and to perform all other acts relating to the edification and well-being of the church.—That the method of ordaining officers, namely pastors and teachers or elders is after their election, by the suffrage of the church, to set them apart with fasting and prayer, and the imposition of the hands of the eldership, though if there be no imposition of hands, they are nevertheless rightly constituted ministers of Christ: but they do not allow that ordination to the work of the ministry, though it be by persons rightly ordained, conveys any office-power, without the previous election of the church."

They disallowed the power of stated synods, presbyteries, convocations, and assemblies of divines, over particular churches; but admitted that, in cases of difficulty, or difference of opinion, churches might meet together by their messengers in synods or councils, to consider and give *advice*, but without exercising any jurisdiction. They agreed that churches consisting of persons sound in the faith and of good conversation, ought not to refuse communion with each other, though they walked not in all things according to the same rule of church order; and if they judged other churches to be true churches, and even less pure, they might receive to occasional communion such members of those churches as were credibly testified to be godly, and to live without offence.

“ These opinions,” say they, “ may appear new to a great many people, because they have not been openly and publicly professed in this country ; but we are able to trace the footsteps of an independent congregational way, in the most ancient practice of the church, and in the writings of the soundest protestant divines. Our principles,” they add, “ do not in the least interfere with the authority of the civil magistrate, nor do we concern ourselves on any occasion with him, any further than to implore his protection, for the preservation of the peace and liberty of our churches. We have always maintained, that, among all Christian states and churches, there ought to be forbearance, and mutual indulgence to Christians of all persuasions, who keep to, and hold fast, the necessary foundations of faith and holiness.”

They concluded by expressing their unfeigned thankfulness to the present governors, for permitting those who could not comply with the presbyterian establishment to enjoy the liberty of their consciences, with equal encouragement and protection as others ; and that this liberty was established by law, so long as they did not disturb the public peace. “ This should engage us,” say they, “ to promote the honour and prosperity of such a government, to be peaceably disposed one towards another, and to love as brethren : for as much as the differences between presbyterians and independents are differences between fellow-servants, neither of whom having authority from God or man, to impose their opinions upon the other.”

These are dignified sentiments, the only foundation of religious liberty, and show, that though the doctrine of Christian freedom was in general very imperfectly understood, there was at least one respectable denomination of Christians, who recognised the doctrine of complete religious emancipation. Had all parties discovered this catholic spirit, and acted on these honourable principles, discord and confusion would have been prevented—universal peace and prosperity promoted. The various important national transactions wonderfully contributed to diffuse and nourish the spirit of free inquiry, and to secure that degree of Christian freedom which England had never witnessed since the rise of antichrist. We wish, however, to be distinctly understood. We do not mean by these remarks to express an unqualified approbation of all the

measures of the present government, or even of the form of government itself, much less of the usurpation by which it was maintained ; but that the government, then founded on more catholic principles, secured the Christian's rights and liberties more effectually than at any former period. Let it not be imagined, that this superior religious freedom was a privilege at all peculiar to the commonwealth, or to the protectorship ; for the most perfect religious emancipation may be equally guaranteed and enjoyed under a king, lords, and commons ; as under any other form of government in the world.

The protector's health, through excessive toil and fatigue, began at length to decline ; and having finished his days, he died September 3, 1658, in the sixtieth year of his age, having been protector four years and eight months. Never was man more highly extolled, or more severely censured, according as men's passions or interests had the ascendancy over their judgments. The king's party abhorred him as a perfidious hypocrite ; the presbyterians thought him little better ; but the advocates of liberality lost their greatest friend by the death of Cromwell, who was not only the unrivalled patron of religious liberty, but a balance to the prevailing lofty notions of ecclesiastical power.

Richard Cromwell, son of Oliver, succeeded him in the office of protector ; when numerous addresses of congratulation were sent him from all parts of the country. He was a person of a calm and peaceable spirit, but destitute of courage ; therefore unfit to be at the head of the nation in these boisterous times. He was highly caressed by the presbyterians, yet he set out on the principles of liberty, declaring that all pious ministers and others should enjoy their liberties according to law, without suffering the least molestation for their religion. The young protector called a parliament, which did very little business ; and finding the nation involved in difficulties, he tamely resigned his high dignity and government, after enjoying it only eight months. The nation being so wearied with changes as not to feel, or so subdued by military power as not to dare to show, any preference of the form of its government, and general Monk declaring in favour of the royal cause, king Charles II. was presently invited and restored to the throne of his ancestors.

The exact state of religion, during this period, is not very easy to ascertain. By some writers it is depreciated to the lowest possible degree; and by others it is exalted beyond all conception. Those who are accurately acquainted with the productions of the divines, who flourished under the commonwealth, will reject, without hesitation, the current tales of universal fanaticism; still the picture of wonderful piety, which others have given of this period, is perhaps too highly coloured. The usurper, says Echard, performed several great and laudable things. He restored public justice nearly to its ancient dignity and splendour. The judges discharged their duties without covetousness, according to law and equity; and the laws, with few exceptions, had full and free course in all courts, without impediment or delay. The outward manners of the people seemed to be really reformed; and the protector's court was regulated by the strictest discipline; where drunkenness, whoredom, and bribery, were either banished or severely punished. Commerce revived and flourished, and the arts of peace were cultivated throughout the nation. No man affected to have a more tender regard for the clergy than the protector; and he gave it out, "that it was his only wish and desire to see the church in peace, and that all would gather together into one sheepfold, under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and mutually love one another."*

The numerous public fasts were observed with singular strictness, and the Lord's day was never so much honoured as at this time. The sermons and other theological productions which were published by the divines of this age, in point of solid literature, sound divinity, and practical utility, will not shrink from a comparison with those of any other period. The universities were the temples of religion, as well as the groves of the muses; and, upon the whole, Christian piety was considerably promoted during the existence of the commonwealth. Whatever judgment, therefore, may be formed of the protector's exaltation and character, we are indebted, under a gracious overruling Providence, to this man for the preservation of the protestant religion among us.†

During the interval between Cromwell's death and the re-

* Echard, p. 719.

† Haweis, vol. iii. p. 30.

storation, the presbyterians advanced in power ; upon which Milton, the zealous champion of liberty, apprehensive of the return of former intolerance, resumed his elegant pen, and endeavoured to ward off the threatening danger. With this great object in view, he published his “ Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes ;” which he addressed to the parliament convened by Richard Cromwell, and in which he endeavoured to prove, that the interference of the magistrate in religious affairs was unlawful.

“ It is the general consent of all protestant writers,” says he, “ that neither the traditions, councils, nor canons of any visible church, much less the edicts of any magistrate or civil session, but the *Scripture only*, can be the rule or final judge in matters of religion, and that only in the conscience of *every individual Christian*. This protestation made by the first public Reformers of our religion against the imperial edicts of Charles the fifth, imposing ecclesiastical traditions, gave the first occasion to the name *Protestant* ; and with that name hath ever been received this doctrine, which prefers the *Scripture* before the church, and acknowledges none but the *Scripture* to be sole interpreter of itself to the conscience. If any man pretend that the Scripture judges to his conscience for other men, he makes himself greater not only than the church, but also than the Scripture, than the consciences of other men—a presumption too high for any mortal. On this ground do all true protestants account the pope antichrist, that he assumes to himself this infallibility over both conscience and Scripture ; ‘ sitting in the temple of God,’ opposed to God, ‘ exalting himself above all that is called God, or is worshipped ;’ not only above all judges and magistrates, but also above God himself, by giving law to Scripture, to conscience, and even to the Spirit of God. Seeing then that in matters of religion, none on earth can judge or determine against the consciences of believers, our Saviour’s interference is, that in those matters they can neither command nor use constraint, lest they run rashly on a pernicious consequence, of which he has forewarned them in the parable ; ‘ Lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest : and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the tares.’

“ It is unlawful for the civil magistrate to use force in matters of religion, because to judge in such things, though the civil magistrate were able, yet hath he no *right*. Christ hath a government of his own, sufficient of itself to all his ends and purposes in governing his church, but widely different from that of the civil magistrate; and this difference principally consists in this, that he governs not by *outward force*: for two reasons. 1. Because this government deals only with the inward man and his actions, which are all spiritual, and so not liable to outward force. 2. To show us the divine excellence of his spiritual kingdom, able, without worldly force, to subdue all the powers and kingdoms of this world, which are upheld wholly by outward force. That the inward man, which consists of his understanding and will, and that his actions thence proceeding, by the work of divine grace upon them, are the whole of religion under the Gospel, will appear plainly by considering what that religion is; whence we shall perceive still more plainly that it cannot be forced. What evangelical religion is, we are informed in two words; Faith and Charity, or Belief and Practice. That one of these flows from the understanding, the other from the will, or both jointly from both, is evident from common sense, unquestioned principles, and the plain testimony of Scripture. ‘Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.’ Our practice, as it is religious, and not merely civil, is produced by the same divine agency, and is declared to be the fruit of the Spirit. Nay, the whole of our religious practice is contained in charity, or our love to God and our neighbour, no way to be forced, yet is it the fulfilling of the law. If then both our belief and practice, which comprehend the whole of religion, flow from faculties of the inward man which are free and unconstrained, and if our practice flow not only from faculties endued with freedom, but also from love and charity, which are incapable of force, how can such religion as this admit of human force? or how can force be in any way applied to such religion, without frustrating and making void, both the religion and the Gospel? To compel persons to an outward profession, without inward religion, is not advancing religion, but compelling them to hypocrisy. To uphold religion otherwise than to defend the religious from outward violence, is

doing no service to Christ or his kingdom ; but is disparaging and degrading it from a divine and spiritual kingdom, to a kingdom of this world : but Christ says, ‘ My kingdom is not of this world : If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews.’ This proves that the kingdom of Christ is not governed by outward force.”*

Thus, this celebrated writer reasoned on the unlawfulness of the magistrate’s coercively enforcing religion upon his subjects. We submit the learned poet’s arguments to the unbiased consideration of the judicious reader, and shall conclude this volume with a few remarks. Having so copiously stated, from approved historical records, the long and arduous struggle against ecclesiastical power, it may very probably be asked, whether those who claimed that power could ever satisfactorily show the grounds of their high authority ? Did they venture to rest their title to the exercise of so extraordinary and awful a prerogative, upon any disputable premises, any obscure traditions, any mere human assumptions, any documents unsupported by truth ? Did they infer this vast power from any principle capable of being turned against themselves ? They ought certainly to have received the broad seal of heaven, authorizing them to enforce their decrees and dogmas, and challenging with commanding evidence the faith and submission of mankind ; otherwise they ought never to have ventured to enforce and constrain men, by those harsh and deadly measures which the ministers of Jesus Christ must have felt reluctant to employ. Have those then, in every age, who have claimed ecclesiastical power, shown their divine commission, with the seal of God upon their instructions, so as to leave no room for the scrupulous to doubt, and to convince the incredulous by its irresistible evidence ? Have they been able to show by an immediate appeal to every man’s understanding and conscience, that the finger of God had appointed them to the high office ? Have they been able at all times to produce the divine attestation to their credentials, as the vicegerents of the Deity ?

Alas ! on all these points they have absolutely failed. All who have restrained liberty of conscience, and have claimed a

* Milton’s Prose Works, vol. i. p. 129—143.

right so to do, because they possessed the *power*, have never yet produced their divine commission, but have refused to acknowledge a similar right in others. Among all those who have made this extraordinary claim, no one church or sect has ever appeared to be possessed of that faculty or ability, by which religious truth might be necessarily and intuitively perceived, in themselves; or by which they might ascertain the precise degree of criminality in the mental errors of other persons. The men who have made this lofty claim, and the men who have rejected it, were all creatures formed of the same dust, living on the same earth, gifted with the same intellect; not one possessing an infallible comprehension of mind, not one of them could guarantee even himself against the wiles and warpings of error. All have erred; all have been frail; all have found the same common grave; all have been endowed with the same mental powers; and all have appealed to the common Maker and Governor of mankind: yet, extraordinary as it may seem, they have all deemed it right, a duty they owed to God, or a gratification to their minds, whenever they have had the *power*, to take their turn in the service of intolerance. Forgetting the humility which the Gospel teaches, the lenity it displays towards human frailties, the patience and clemency of its Founder, the veneration due to the prerogative of Deity, and the sacred functions of the supreme Judge, they have unwisely rushed into his seat, unhesitatingly pronounced his decisions, and instantly called for fire from heaven; and when it has failed to descend at their command, they have called up the unhallowed flames from beneath, to inflict those *holy restraints* which they deemed justly due to the mental and religious delinquency of their unhappy victims !!

Were it possible for any party of Christians to produce the most unequivocal testimony to the correctness of their religious opinions, it would not thence follow that other parties ought to be persecuted for not believing those opinions, or be restrained in the slightest degree from the free exercise of their judgments in believing otherwise. The right to persecute, it should be remembered, is not conveyed by that sacred volume which imparts accurate and precise knowledge of God and his salvation. So that, supposing we had infallibly ascertained

the sense of Scripture, we should not by that means have acquired any additional right to coerce our Christian brethren, or to prevent them in the free exercise of those faculties, for the use or abuse of which they are accountable only at the bar of Omniscience. The New Testament is absolutely silent on these three points :—the degrees of guilt involved in speculative error—the party to whom the supposed right of punishing religious delinquents is delegated—and the *fact* of such a delegation. These three points, therefore, must necessarily become the matter of a new revelation from heaven, before the claim of ecclesiastical power can have any foundation to rest upon, and before any degree of religious interference or restraint, by any human power, can be justified from Scripture.

The love of power, impatience of contradiction, the pleasure of dictation, the giddy insolence inspired by worldly wealth and secular superiority, are the hateful principles to which intolerance has always been indebted for its existence and its support. These principles acting with more or less violence in men of different denominations, while the sharpness of their tempers was only partially meliorated by the Gospel, have led most men into this dangerous error, that, with power in their hands, it was their duty to compel men to be of their religious persuasion. That these principles, connected with that worldly aggrandizement at which the Romish church has constantly aimed, should inspire *her* breast with intolerance, is nothing marvellous ; but that men setting out with a professed abjuration of her principles, and her spirit, and all her other evils, taking their stand solely on the *Holy Scriptures*, and aiming at a direct imitation of the *Saviour's example*—that men seeking a reformation of the spirit and practice, as well as the doctrine and ceremonies of the ancient church, should rush headlong into similar intolerance, while it excites our wonder and regret, it ought to be held up as a beacon to posterity.

Let it be frankly acknowledged, since it appears on the evidence of indubitable fact, that the protestantism of most of the Reformers, was little less fierce than the popery which they endeavoured to overthrow, while their own system in one of its fundamental principles still needed a radical reformation. They might assert for themselves the right of private judgment, but they did not allow that right in others, especially to

the extent that impartial justice required. The Reformers from popery, the Reformers from episcopacy, the Reformers from presbyterianism, have all in a greater or lesser degree, violated the sacred and invaluable right of religious freedom. No very considerable effort was made during the progress of these various reformatations, to ascertain the extent of the rights of conscience, or to maintain that enlightened religious liberty, which, we regret to add, is still not universally understood. The views of mankind upon this subject, as upon many other grand and important principles, have been only very gradually enlightened.

It becomes us as individuals, and as Christian societies to cherish a spirit of forbearance and kindness towards those who differ from us. This the Gospel strongly inculcates; and when charity is happily mixed with a love and zeal for truth, it cannot go too far: but charity forms no part of civil legislation and enactment. The guarantee of religious liberty is not charity. If the governments of the world have obtruded upon the prerogative of the King of kings, by legislating in his name, raising some of his subjects to secular power and distinction, and depressing, persecuting, or destroying others equally worthy of protection, they have thus far usurped his authority and his throne; and every act by which they relinquish what they ought never to have assumed, is not the bestowment of a *favour*, but the restoration of a *right*. It is yielding back to Jesus Christ what had been unjustly wrested from his hands, and allowing his sheep the pasturage and waters of life, of which ecclesiastical tyranny had deprived them.*

A right to dictate and enforce in religion, implies an existing superiority. But that superiority which is absolutely essential to dictate and coerce on religious subjects can belong only to the Creator; and for any human being to assume the right of dictation in religion, is an arrogant invasion of the divine prerogative. He who admits the authoritative interference of man, with the affairs of religion and conscience, allows an impious innovation on the rights of God, and consents to rob the Deity of that intellectual and spiritual dominion which is peculiar to his omniscience. The intervention of any inferior authority over conscience, or of any restraint of religious

* Legend, p. 68.

belief and practice, is the height of injustice, and admits neither explanation nor palliation. Here, an infringement upon liberty destroys the moral character of man, and produces anarchy of the worst kind among the works of God: especially since all our actions are good or evil, only as they have, or have not, their origin in liberty of choice. If we are to answer for our faith and actions before the tribunal of God, and yet be summoned before the tribunal of men, and forced to believe and practise what they prescribe, we shall be placed in the most miserable dilemma:—our spiritual guardians will be guilty of injustice and cruelty which can only be estimated by the fearful retribution at the bar of God.

The nature and requirements of the Gospel are *wholly personal*, and its religion is a personal religion, of equal importance to every living soul. Its appeals are all directed to the judgment, conscience, and affections of every individual. The acceptance of it must be unforced by any human power, and its subjects must be willing subjects. It must produce distinct personal conviction; and, upon this secure basis, it must enforce, without human coercion, all the duties of personal obedience. It refuses, in the most explicit terms, those acts of religious worship which rest on the slender ground of human authority:—"Their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men."—"Howbeit, in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." He who searches and tries the heart, rejects and abhors that *fear* and that *worship* which is taught by human injunctions. Every human addition commanding and enforcing Christian worship, is a presumptuous intrusion upon sacred things, a drawback upon the essence of Christian piety, and an impious encroachment on the Divine prerogative. We are, however, very far from asserting the innocence of mental error; yet the infinite intelligence *alone* can establish the standard of its judgment, and ascertain the degree of its criminality. It is impossible for human beings to exercise compulsive interference, directly or indirectly, with individual conviction on religious subjects, without openly robbing men of their dearest rights, flagrantly subverting their strongest obligations, and impiously invading the prerogative of the Deity.

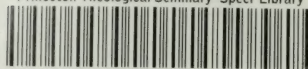
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